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COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. CXI.

LUCRETIA BY SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, Bart.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

VOL. I

...

"THE NOVELIST'S MAGAZINE AND YOUNG MAN'S"

VOL. CXI.

BRITISH AUTHORS.

OR,

COLLECTION

LUCRETIA:

OR,

THE CHILDREN OF NIGHT.

BY

SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, Bart.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNH. TAUCHNITZ JUN.

1846.

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PREFACE.

It is somewhere about four years since I appeared before the public as the writer of a fiction, which I then intimated would probably be my last; but bad habits are stronger than good intentions. When Fabricio, in his hospital, resolved upon abjuring the vocation of the Poet, he was in truth, recommencing his desperate career by a Farewell to the Muses: — I need not apply the allusion.

I must own, however, that there had long been a desire in my mind to trace, in some work or other, — the strange and secret ways through which that Arch-ruler of Civilization, familiarly called 'Money,' — insinuates itself into our thoughts and motives, our hearts and actions; affecting those who undervalue as those who overestimate its importance; ruining virtues in the spendthrift no less than engendering vices in the miser. But when I half implied my farewell to the character of a novelist, I had imagined that this conception might be best worked out upon the stage. After some unpublished and imperfect attempts towards so realizing my design, I found either that the subject was too wide for the limits of the Drama, or that I wanted that faculty of concentration which alone enables the dramatist to compress multiform varieties into a very limited compass. With this design, I desired to unite some exhibition of what seems to me a principal vice in the hot and emulous chase for happiness or

fame, fortune or knowledge, which is almost synonymous with the cant phrase of "the March of Intellect," in that crisis of society to which we have arrived. The vice I allude to is Impatience. That eager desire to press forward, not so much to conquer obstacles, as to elude them; that gambling with the solemn destinies of life, seeking ever to set success upon the chance of a die; that hastening from the wish conceived to the end accomplished; that thirst after quick returns to ingenious toil, and breathless spurrings along short cuts to the goal, which we see everywhere around us, from the Mechanics' Institute to the Stock Market, — beginning in education with the primers of infancy — deluging us with "Philosophies for the Million," and "Sciences made easy;" characterizing the books of our writers, the speeches of our statesmen, no less than the dealings of our speculators, seem, I confess, to me, to constitute a very diseased and very general symptom of the times. I hold that the greatest friend to man is labour; that knowledge without toil, if possible, were worthless; that toil in pursuit of knowledge is the best knowledge we can attain; that the continuous effort for fame is nobler than fame itself; that it is not wealth suddenly acquired which is deserving of homage, but the virtues which a man exercises in the slow pursuit of wealth, — the abilities so called forth, the self-denials so imposed: in a word, that Labour and Patience are the true schoolmasters on earth. While occupied with these ideas and this belief, whether right or wrong, and slowly convinced that it was only in that species of composition to which I was most familiar that I could work out some portion of the plan that I began to contemplate, I became acquainted with the histories of two criminals, existing in our own age; — so remarkable, whether from the extent and darkness of the guilt committed — whether from the glittering accomplishments and lively temper of the one, the profound knowledge and intellectual capacities of the other — that the examination and analysis of characters so perverted became a study full of intense, if gloomy interest.

In these persons there appear to have been as few redeemable points as can be found in Human Nature, so far as such points

may be traced in the kindly instincts and generous passions which do sometimes accompany the perpetration of great crimes, and without excusing the individual, vindicate the species. Yet, on the other hand, their sanguinary wickedness was not the dull ferocity of brutes; — it was accompanied with instruction and culture: — nay, it seemed to me, on studying their lives, and pondering over their own letters, that through their cultivation itself we could arrive at the secret of the ruthless and atrocious pre-eminence in evil these Children of Night had attained — that here the monster vanished into the mortal, and the phenomena that seemed aberrations from nature were explained.

I could not resist the temptation of reducing to a tale the materials which had so engrossed my interest and tasked my inquiries. And in this attempt, various incidental opportunities have occurred, if not of completely carrying out, still of incidentally illustrating, my earlier design; — of showing the influence of Mammon upon our most secret selves, and of reproving the impatience which is engendered by a civilization — that with much of the good brings all the evils of competition: In such incidental bearings the moral may doubtless be more obvious than in the delineation of the darker and rarer crime which forms the staple of my narrative. For in extraordinary guilt, we are slow to recognise ordinary warnings — we say to the peaceful conscience, "This concerns thee not!" — whereas at each instance of familiar fault and common-place error we own a direct and sensible admonition. Yet in the portraiture of gigantic crime, poets have rightly found their sphere, and fulfilled their destiny, of teachers. Those terrible truths, which appal us in the guilt of Macbeth, or the villany of Iago, have their moral uses not less than the popular infirmities of Tom Jones, or the every-day hypocrisy of Blifil.

Incredible as it may seem, the crimes herein related took place within the last seventeen years. There has been no exaggeration as to their extent, no great departure from their details — the means employed, even that which seems most far-fetched (the instrument of the poisoned ring,) have their foundation in literal facts. Nor have I much altered the social

position of the criminals, nor in the least over-rated their attainments and intelligence. In those more salient essentials, which will most, perhaps, provoke the Reader's incredulous wonder, I narrate a history, not invent a fiction.* All that romance which our own time affords is not more the romance than the philosophy of the time. Tragedy never quits the world—it surrounds us everywhere. We have but to look, wakeful and vigilant, abroad, — and from the age of Pelops to that of Borgia, the same crimes, though under different garbs, will stalk on our paths. Each age comprehends in itself specimens of every virtue and every vice which has ever inspired our love or moved our horror.

London, *November*, 1, 1846.

* These criminals were not, however, in actual life, as in the novel, intimates and accomplices. Their crimes were of similiar character, effected by similar agencies, and committed at dates which embrace their several careers of guiit within the same period; but I have no authority to suppose that the one was known to the other.

NOTE.

The passage in vol. I., from p. 227, l. 23, to p. 228, l. 7, has been freely plagiarized from the powerful description of a picture which occurs in one of M. de Balzac's striking novels.

The passage in vol. I., p. 297, l. 18 to l. 24, is, in much, a repetition of an illustration in 'Zanoni.' The repetition was purposely made, in order to apply the illustration in a totally different sense

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PART THE FIRST.

PROLOGUE TO PART THE FIRST.

In an apartment at Paris, one morning, during the Reign of Terror, a man whose age might be somewhat under thirty, sate before a table covered with papers, arranged and labelled with the methodical precision of a mind fond of order and habituated to business. Behind him rose a tall book-case, surmounted with a bust of Robespierre, and the shelves were filled chiefly with works of a scientific character; amongst which the greater number were on chemistry and medicine. There were to be seen also many rare books on alchemy, the great Italian historians, some English philosophical treatises, and a few MSS. in Arabic. The absence, from this collection, of the stormy literature of the day, seemed to denote that the owner was a quiet student, living apart from the strife and passions of the Revolution. This supposition was, however, disproved by certain papers on the table, which were formally and laconically labelled "Reports on Lyons," and by packets of letters in the handwritings of Robespierre and Couthon. At one of the windows, a young boy was earnestly engaged in some occupation, which appeared to excite the curiosity of the person just described; for this last, after examining the child's movements for a few moments with a silent scrutiny, which betrayed but little of the half-complacent, half-melancholy affection with which busy man is apt to regard idle childhood, rose noiselessly from his seat, approached the boy, and looked over his shoulder unobserved. In a crevice of the wood by the window, a huge black

spider had formed his web; the child had just discovered another spider, and placed it in the meshes; he was watching the result of his operations. The intrusive spider stood motionless in the midst of the web, as if fascinated. The rightful possessor was also quiescent; but a very fine ear might have caught a low humming sound, which probably augured no hospitable intentions to the invader. Anon, the stranger insect seemed suddenly to awake from its amaze; it evinced alarm, and turned to fly; the huge spider darted forward — the boy uttered a chuckle of delight. The man's pale lip curled into a sinister sneer, and he glided back to his seat. There, leaning his face on his hand, he continued to contemplate the child. That child might have furnished to an artist a fitting subject for fair and blooming infancy. His light hair, tinged deeply, it is true, with red, hung in sleek and glittering abundance down his neck and shoulders. His features, seen in profile, were delicately and almost familiarly proportioned; health glowed on his cheek, and his form, slight though it was, gave promise of singular activity and vigour. His dress was fantastic, and showed the taste of some fondly foolish mother; but the fine linen, trimmed with lace, was rumpled and stained, the velvet jacket unbrushed, the shoes soiled with dust; — slight tokens these of neglect — but serving to show that the foolish fondness which had invented the dress, had not of late presided over the toilet.

"Child," said the man, first in French; and observing that the boy heeded him not — "child," he repeated in English, which he spoke well, though with a foreign accent — "child!"

The boy turned quickly.

"Has the great spider devoured the small one?"

"No, Sir," said the boy, colouring; "the small one has had the best of it." The tone and heightened complexion of the child seemed to give meaning to his words — at least, so the

man thought,— for a slight frown passed over his high, thoughtful brow.

"Spiders, then," he said, after a short pause, "are different from men; with us, the small do not get the better of the great. Hum! do you still miss your mother?"

"Oh, yes!" and the boy advanced eagerly to the table.

"Well, you will see her once again."

"When?"

The man looked towards a clock on the mantelpiece — "Before that clock strikes. Now, go back to your spiders." The child looked irresolute and disinclined to obey; but a stern and terrible expression gathered slowly over the man's face; and the boy, growing pale as he remarked it, crept back to the window.

The father, for such was the relation the owner of the room bore to the child, drew paper and ink towards him, and wrote for some minutes rapidly. Then starting up, he glanced at the clock, took his hat and cloak, which lay on a chair beside, drew up the collar of the mantle till it almost concealed his countenance, and said — "Now, boy, come with me, I have promised to show you an execution. I am going to keep my promise. Come!"

The boy clapped his hands with joy; and you might see then, child as he was, that those fair features were capable of a cruel and ferocious expression. The character of the whole face changed. He caught up his gay cap and plume, and followed his father into the streets.

Silently the two took their way towards the *Barrière du Trône*. At a distance, they saw the crowd growing thick and dense, as throng after throng hurried past them, and the dreadful guillotine rose high in the light blue air. As they came into the skirts of the mob, the father, for the first time, took his child's hand. "I must get you a good place for the show," he said, with a quiet smile.

There was something in the grave, staid, courteous, yet haughty bearing of the man, that made the crowd give way as he passed. They got near the dismal scene, and obtained entrance into a wagon already crowded with eager spectators.

And now they heard at a distance the harsh and lumbering roll of the tumbril that bore the victims, and the tramp of the horses which guarded the procession of death. The boy's whole attention was absorbed in expectation of the spectacle, and his ear was, perhaps, less accustomed to French, though born and reared in France, than to the language of his mother's lips — and she was English: thus he did not hear or heed certain observations of the bye-standers, which made his father's pale cheek grow paler.

"What is the batch to-day?" quoth a butcher in the wagon.

"Scarce worth the baking — only two: — but one, they say, is an aristocrat — a *çi-devant* marquis," answered a carpenter.

"Ah! a marquis! — *Bon!* — And the other?"

"Only a dancer; but a pretty one, it is true: I could pity her; but she is English." And as he pronounced the last word, with a tone of inexpressible contempt, the butcher spat, as if in nausea.

"*Mort diable!* a spy of Pitt's, no doubt. What did they discover?"

A man better dressed than the rest, turned round with a smile, and answered — "Nothing worse than a lover, I believe; but that lover was a *proscrit*. The *çi-devant* marquis was caught disguised in her apartment. She betrayed for him a good easy friend of the people, who had long loved her, and revenge is sweet."

The man whom we have accompanied nervously twitched up the collar of his cloak, and his compressed lips told that he felt the anguish of the laugh that circled round him.

"They are coming! there they are!" cried the boy in ecstatic excitement.

"That 's the way to bring up citizens," said the butcher, patting the child's shoulder, and opening a still better view for him at the edge of the wagon.

The crowd now abruptly gave way. The tumbril was in sight. A man, young and handsome, standing erect and with folded arms in the fatal vehicle, looked along the mob with an eye of careless scorn. Though he wore the dress of a workman, the most unpractised glance could detect, in his mien and bearing, one of the hated *noblesse*, whose characteristics came out even more forcibly at the hour of death. On the lip was that smile of gay and insolent levity, on the brow that gallant if reckless contempt of physical danger, which had signalized the hero-coxcombs of the old *régime*. Even the rude dress was worn with a certain air of foppery, and the bright hair was carefully adjusted as if for the holiday of the headsman. As the eyes of the young noble wandered over the fierce faces of that horrible assembly, while a roar of hideous triumph answered the look, in which for the last time the *gentilhomme* spoke his scorn of the *canaille*, the child's father lowered the collar of his cloak, and slowly raised his hat from his brow. The eye of the marquis rested upon the countenance thus abruptly shown to him, and which suddenly became individualized amongst the crowd, — that eye instantly lost its calm contempt. A shudder passed visibly over his frame, and his cheek grew blanched with terror. The mob saw the change, but not the cause, and loud and louder rose their triumphant yell. The sound recalled the pride of the young noble; — he started — lifted his crest erect, and sought again to meet the look which had appalled him. But he could no longer single it out among the crowd. Hat and cloak once more hid the face of the foe, and crowds of eager heads intercepted the view. The young marquis's lips muttered; he bent down, and then the

crowd caught sight of his companion, who was being lifted up from the bottom of the tumbril, where she had flung herself in horror and despair. The crowd grew still in a moment, as the pale face of one, familiar to most of them, turned wildly from place to place in the dreadful scene, vainly and madly through its silence, imploring life and pity. How often had the sight of that face, not then pale and haggard, but wreathed with rosy smiles, sufficed to draw down the applause of the crowded theatre — how, then, had those breasts, now fevered by the thirst of blood, held hearts spell-bound by the airy movements of that exquisite form writhing now in no stage-mime agony! Plaything of the city — minion to the light amusement of the hour — frail child of Cytherea and the Graces, — what relentless fate has conducted *thee* to the shambles? Butterfly of the summer, why should a nation rise to break *thee* upon the wheel? A sense of the mockery of such an execution, of the horrible burlesque that would sacrifice to the necessities of a mighty people so slight an offering, made itself felt among the crowd. There was a low murmur of shame and indignation. The dangerous sympathy of the mob was perceived by the officer in attendance. Hastily he made the sign to the headsman, and, as he did so, a child's cry was heard in the English tongue — "Mother — mother!" The Father's hand grasped the child's arm, with an iron pressure; the crowd swam before the boy's eyes; the air seemed to stifle him, and become blood-red; only through the hum, and the tramp, and the roll of the drums, he heard a low voice hiss in his ear — "Learn how they perish, who betray me!"

As the father said these words, again his face was bare, and the woman whose ear, amidst the dull insanity of fear, had caught the cry of her child's voice, saw that face, and fell back insensible in the arms of the headsman.

PART THE FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

A FAMILY GROUPE.

One July evening, at the commencement of the present century, several persons were somewhat picturesquely grouped along an old-fashioned terrace, which skirted the garden side of a manor-house that had considerable pretensions to baronial dignity. The architecture was of the most enriched and elaborate style belonging to the reign of James the First: the porch, opening on the terrace, with its mullion window above, was encased with pilasters and reliefs, at once ornamental and massive; and the large square tower in which it was placed, was surmounted by a stone falcon, whose talons griped fiercely, a scutcheon blazoned with the five-pointed stars which heralds recognise as the arms of St. John. On either side this tower, extended long wings, the dark brickwork of which was relieved with noble stone casements and carved pediments; the high roof was partially concealed by a balustrade, perforated not inelegantly into arabesque designs; and what architects call 'the sky line' was broken with imposing effect by tall chimney shafts, of various form and fashion. These wings terminated in angular towers, similar to the centre, though kept duly subordinate to it both in size and decoration, and crowned with stone cupolas. A low balustrade, of later date than that which adorned the roof, relieved by vases and statues, bordered the terrace, from which

a double flight of steps descended to a smooth lawn, intersected by broad gravel walks, shadowed by vast and stately cedars, and gently and gradually mingling with the wilder scenery of the park, from which it was only divided by a ha-ha.

Upon the terrace, and under cover of a temporary awning, sate the owner, Sir Miles St. John, of Laughton, a comely old man, dressed with faithful precision to the costume which he had been taught to consider appropriate to his rank of gentleman, and which was not yet wholly absolete and eccentric. His hair, still thick and luxuriant, was carefully powdered, and collected into a club behind. His nether man attired in gray breeches and pearl-coloured silk stockings; his vest of silk, opening wide at the breast, and showing a profusion of frill, slightly sprinkled with the pulvilio of his favourite martinique; his three-cornered hat, placed on a stool at his side, with a gold headed crutch-cane,—had made rather to be carried in the hand than worn on the head, the diamond in his shirt-breast, the diamond on his finger, the ruffles at his wrist,— all bespoke the gallant, who had chatted with Lord Chesterfield, and supped with Mrs. Clive. On a table before him, were placed two or three decanters of wine, the fruits of the season, an enamelled snuff-box, in which was set the portrait of a female — perhaps the Chloe or Phillis of his early love-ditties; a lighted taper, a small china jar containing tobacco, and three or four pipes of homely clay, for cherry-sticks and meerschaums were not then in fashion; and Sir Miles St. John, once a gay and sparkling beau, now a popular country gentleman, great at county meetings and sheep-shearing festivals, had taken to smoking, as in harmony with his bucolic transformation; an old setter lay dozing at his feet; a small spaniel — old, too — was sauntering lazily in the immediate neighbourhood, looking gravely out for such stray bits of biscuit as had been thrown forth to provoke him to exercise, and which hitherto had escaped his attention. Half seated,

half reclined on the balustrade, apart from the Baronet, but within reach of his conversation, lolled a man in the prime of life, with an air of unmistakable and sovereign elegance and distinction. Mr. Vernon was a guest from London: and the London man, the man of clubs, and dinners and routs — of noon loungings through Bond Street; and nights spent with the Prince of Wales, seemed stamped not more upon the careful carelessness of his dress, and upon the worn expression of his delicate features, than upon the listless *ennui*, which, characterizing both his face and attitude, appeared to take pity on himself for having been entrapped into the country.

Yet we should convey an erroneous impression of Mr. Vernon, if we designed, by the words "listless *ennui*," to depict the slumberous insipidity of more modern affectation — it was not the *ennui* of a man to whom *ennui* is habitual; it was rather the indolent prostration that fills up the intervals of excitement. At that day, the word "*blasé*" was unknown; men had not enough sentiment for satiety. There was a kind of Bacchanalian fury in the life led by those leaders of fashion among whom Mr. Vernon was not the least distinguished: it was a day of deep drinking, of high play, of jovial reckless dissipation — of strong appetite for fun and riot — of four-in-hand coachmanship — of prize-fighting — of a strange sort of barbarous manliness, that strained every nerve of the constitution; a race of life, in which three-fourths of the competitors died half-way in the hippodrome. What is now the Dandy was then the Buck; and something of the Buck, though subdued by a chaster taste than fell to the ordinary members of his class, was apparent in Mr. Vernon's costume as well as air. Intricate folds of muslin, arranged in prodigious bows and ends, formed the cravat, which Brummell had not yet arisen to reform; his hat of a very peculiar shape, low at the crown and broad at the brim, was worn with an air of devil-me-care defiance; his watch-chain, garnished with a pro-

fusion of rings and seals, hung low from his white waistcoat; and the adaptation of his nankin inexpressibles to his well-shaped limbs, was a masterpiece of art. His whole dress and air was not what could properly be called foppish — it was rather what at that time was called 'rakish.' Few could so closely approach vulgarity without being vulgar: of that privileged few, Mr. Vernon was one of the elect. Further on, and near the steps descending into the garden, stood a man in an attitude of profound abstraction; his arms folded, his eyes bent on the ground, his brows slightly contracted; his dress was a plain black surtout, and pantaloons of the same colour; something both in the fashion of the dress, and still more in the face of the man, bespoke the foreigner.

Sir Miles St. John was an accomplished person for that time of day; he had made the grand tour; he had bought pictures and statues; he spoke and wrote well in the modern languages; and being rich, hospitable, social, and not averse from the reputation of a patron, he had opened his house freely to the hosts of emigrants whom the French Revolution had driven to our coasts. Olivier Dalibard, a man of considerable learning and rare scientific attainments, had been tutor in the house of the Marquis de G—, a French nobleman, known many years before to the old baronet. The Marquis and his family had been among the first *emigrés* at the outbreak of the Revolution. The tutor had remained behind; for at that time no danger appeared to threaten those who pretended to no other aristocracy than that of letters. Contrary, as he said, with repentant modesty, to his own inclinations, he had been compelled, not only for his own safety, but for that of his friends, to take some part in the subsequent events of the Revolution—a part far from sincere, though so well had he simulated the patriot, that he had won the personal favour and protection of Robespierre; nor till the fall of that virtuous exterminator had he withdrawn from the game of politics, and

effected in disguise his escape to England. As, whether from kindly or other motives, he had employed the power of his position in the esteem of Robespierre, to save certain noble heads from the guillotine — amongst others, the two brothers of the Marquis de G—, he was received with grateful welcome by his former patrons, who readily pardoned his career of Jacobinism, from their belief in his excuses, and their obligations to the services which that very career had enabled him to render to their kindred. Olivier Dalibard had accompanied the Marquis and his family in one of the frequent visits they paid to Laughton; and when the Marquis finally quitted England, and fixed his refuge at Vienna, with some connexions of his wife's, he felt a lively satisfaction at the thought of leaving his friend honourably, if unambitiously, provided for, as secretary and librarian to Sir Miles St. John. In fact, the scholar, who possessed considerable powers of fascination, had won no less favour with the English baronet than he had with the French dictator. He played well both at chess and backgammon; he was an extraordinary accountant; he had a variety of information upon all points, that rendered him more convenient than any cyclopædia in Sir Miles's library; and as he spoke both English and Italian with a correctness and fluency extremely rare in a Frenchman, he was of considerable service in teaching languages to, (as well as directing the general literary education of) Sir Miles's favourite niece — whom we shall take an early opportunity to describe at length.

Nevertheless, there had been one serious obstacle to Dalibard's acceptance of the appointment offered to him by Sir Miles. Dalibard had under his charge a young orphan boy of some ten or twelve years old— a boy whom Sir Miles was not long in suspecting to be the scholar's son. This child had come from France with Dalibard, and (while the Marquis's family were in London) remained under the eye and care of his guardian or father, whichever was the true connexion between the two. But this super-

intendence became impossible, if Dalibard settled in Hampshire with Sir Miles St. John and the boy remained in London; nor, though the generous old gentleman offered to pay for the child's schooling, would Dalibard consent to part with him. At last, the matter was arranged: the boy was invited to Laughton on a visit, and was so lively, yet so well mannered, that he became a favourite, and was now fairly quartered in the house with his reputed father: and, not to make an unnecessary mystery of this connexion, such was in truth the relationship between Olivier Dalibard and Honoré Gabriel Varney — a name significant of the double and illegitimate origin — a French father, an English mother. Half way down the steps stood the lad, pencil and tablet in hand, sketching. Let us look over his shoulder — it is his father's likeness — a countenance in itself not very remarkable at the first glance, for the features were small, but when examined, it was one that most persons, women especially, would have pronounced handsome, and to which none could deny the higher praise of thought and intellect. A native of Provençe, with some Italian blood in his veins — for his grandfather, a merchant of Marseilles, had married into a Florentine family settled at Leghorn — the dark complexion, common with those in the south, had been subdued, probably by the habits of the student, into a bronzed and steadfast paleness, which seemed almost fair by the contrast of the dark hair which he wore unpowdered, and the still darker brows which hung thick and prominent over clear gray eyes. Compared with the features, the skull was disproportionally large, both behind and before; and a physiognomist would have drawn conclusions more favourable to the power than the tenderness of the Provençal's character, from the compact closeness of the lips and the breadth and massiveness of the iron jaw. But the son's sketch exaggerated every feature, and gave to the expression a malignant and terrible irony, not now, at least, apparent in the quiet and meditative

aspect. Gabriel himself, as he stood, would have been a more tempting study to many an artist. It is true that he was small for his years; but his frame had a vigour in its light proportions, which came from a premature and almost adolescent symmetry of shape and muscular development. The countenance, however, had much of effeminate beauty; the long hair reached the shoulders, but did not curl; straight, fine, and glossy as a girl's, and, in colour, of the pale auburn, tinged with red, which rarely alters in hue as childhood matures to man; the complexion was dazzlingly clear and fair: Nevertheless, there was something so hard in the lip, so bold, though not open, in the brow, that the girlishness of complexion, and even of outline, could not leave, on the whole, an impression of effeminacy. All the hereditary keenness and intelligence were stamped upon his face at that moment; but the expression had also a large share of the very irony and malice which he had conveyed to his caricature. The drawing itself was wonderfully vigorous and distinct, showing great artistic promise, and done with the rapidity and ease which betrayed practice. Suddenly his father turned, and with as sudden a quickness, the boy concealed his tablet in his vest; and the sinister expression of his face smoothed into a timorous smile, as his eye encountered Dalibard's. The father beckoned to the boy, who approached with alacrity. "Gabriel," whispered the Frenchman, in his own tongue, "where are they at this moment?"

The boy pointed silently towards one of the cedars. Dalibard mused an instant, and then slowly descending the steps, took his noiseless way over the smooth turf towards the tree. Its boughs drooped low and spread wide; and not till he was within a few paces of the spot, could his eye perceive two forms, seated on a bench under the dark green canopy. He then paused and contemplated them.

The one was a young man, whose simple dress and subdued

air strongly contrasted the artificial graces and the modish languor of Mr. Vernon; but though wholly without that nameless distinction which sometimes characterizes those conscious of pure race, and habituated to the atmosphere of courts, he had at least Nature's stamp of aristocracy in a form eminently noble, and features of manly, but surpassing beauty, which were not rendered less engaging by an expression of modest timidity. He seemed to be listening with thoughtful respect to his companion, a young female by his side, who was speaking to him with an earnestness visible in her gestures and her animated countenance. And though there was much to notice in the various persons scattered over the scene, not one, perhaps — not the graceful Vernon — not the thoughtful scholar, nor his fair-haired hard-lipped son — not even the handsome listener she addressed — no, not one there would so have arrested the eye, whether of a physiognomist or a casual observer, as that young girl — Sir Miles St. John's favourite niece and presumptive heiress.

But as at that moment, the expression of her face differed from that habitual to it, we defer its description.

"Do not" — such were her words to her companion, — "do not alarm yourself by exaggerating the difficulties; do not even contemplate them — those be my care. Mainwaring, when I loved you, when, seeing that your diffidence or your pride forbade you to be the first to speak, I overstepped the modesty or the dissimulation of my sex; when I said, — 'Forget that I am the reputed heiress of Laughton; see in me but the faults and merits of the human being, of the wild unregulated girl; see in me but Lucretia Clavering (here her cheeks blushed, and her voice sank into a lower and more tremulous whisper), and love her if you can!' — When I went thus far, do not think I had not measured all the difficulties in the way of our union, and felt that I could surmount them."

"But," answered Mainwaring, hesitatingly, "can you con-

ceive it possible that your uncle ever will consent? Is not pride — the pride of family — almost the leading attribute of his character? Did he not discard your mother — his own sister — from his house and heart, for no other offence but a second marriage, which he deemed beneath her? Has he ever even consented to see, much less to receive, your half-sister — the child of that marriage? Is not his very affection for you interwoven with his pride in you, with his belief in your ambition? Has he not summoned your cousin, Mr. Vernon, for the obvious purpose of favouring a suit which he considers worthy of you, and which, if successful, will unite the two branches of his ancient house? How is it possible that he can ever hear, without a scorn and indignation which would be fatal to your fortunes, that your heart has presumed to choose, in William Mainwaring, a man without ancestry or career?"

"Not without career!" interrupted Lucretia, proudly. "Do you think, if you were master of Laughton, that your career would not be more brilliant than that of yon indolent luxurious coxcomb? Do you think that I could have been poor-hearted enough to love you, if I had not recognised in you energies and talents that correspond with my own ambition? For I am ambitious, as you know, and therefore my mind, as well as my heart, went with my love for you."

"Ah, Lucretia! but can Sir Miles St. John see my future rise in my present obscurity?"

"I do not say that he can, or will; but if you love me, we can wait. Do not fear the rivalry of Mr. Vernon. I shall know how to free myself from so tame a peril. We can wait — my uncle is old — his habits preclude the chance of a much longer life — he has already had severe attacks. We are young, dear Mainwaring: what is a year or two to those who hope?"

Mainwaring's face fell, and a displeasing chill passed through his veins. Could this young creature, her uncle's petted and

trusted darling, she who should be the soother of his infirmities, the prop of his age, the sincerest mourner at his grave, weigh coldly thus the chances of his death, and point at once to the altar and the tomb?

He was saved from the embarrassment of reply by Dalibard's approach.

"More than half an hour absent," said the scholar in his own language, with a smile, and drawing out his watch, he placed it before their eyes; "do you not think that all will miss you? Do you suppose, Miss Clavering, that your uncle has not, ere this, asked for his fair niece? Come, and forestal him." He offered his arm to Lucretia as he spoke. She hesitated a moment, and then, turning to Mainwaring, held out her hand: he pressed it, though scarcely with a lover's warmth; and as she walked back to the terrace with Dalibard, the young man struck slowly into the opposite direction, and passing by a gate, over a foot-bridge, that led from the ha-ha into the park, bent his way towards a lake which gleamed below at some distance, half concealed by groves of venerable trees, rich with the prodigal boughs of summer. Meanwhile, as they passed towards the house, Dalibard, still using his native tongue, thus accosted his pupil: —

"You must pardon me if I think more of your interests than you do; and pardon me no less if I encroach on your secrets and alarm your pride. This young man — can you be guilty of the folly of more than a passing caprice for his society? of more than the amusement of playing with his vanity? Even if that be all, beware of entangling yourself in your own meshes."

"You do, in truth, offend me," said Lucretia, with calm haughtiness, "and you have not the right thus to speak to me."

"Not the right," repeated the Provençal, mournfully; "not the right! — then, indeed, I am mistaken in my pupil. Do you conceive that I would have lowered my pride to remain here as a dependent, that, conscious of attainments, and perhaps of abili-

ties, that should win their way, even in exile, to distinction, I would have frittered away my life in these rustic shades, if I had not formed in you a deep and absorbing interest; in that interest I ground my right to warn and counsel you. I saw, or fancied I saw, in you a mind congenial to my own — a mind above the frivolities of your sex — a mind, in short, with the grasp and energy of a man's. You were then but a child; you are scarcely yet a woman; yet have I not given to your intellect the strong food on which the statesmen of Florence fed their pupil princes; or the noble Jesuits, the noble men who were destined to extend the secret empire of the imperishable Loyola?"

"You gave me the taste for a knowledge rare in my sex, I own," answered Lucretia, with a slight tone of regret in her voice; "and in the knowledge you have communicated I felt a charm that, at times, seems to me to be only fatal. You have confounded in my mind evil and good, or, rather, you have left both good and evil as dead ashes, as the dust and cinder of a crucible. You have made intellect the only conscience. Of late, I wish that my tutor had been a village priest."

"Of late! since you have listened to the pastorals of that meek Corydon?"

"Dare you despise him — and for what? that he is good and honest?"

"I despise him not because he is good and honest, but because he is of the common herd of men, without aim or character. And is it for this youth that you will sacrifice your fortunes, your ambition, the station you were born to fill and have been reared to improve — this youth in whom there is nothing but the lap-dog's merit — sleekness and beauty. Ay, frown, — the frown betrays you — you love him!"

"And if I do?" said Lucretia, raising her tall form to its utmost height, and haughtily facing her inquisitor. "And if I do, what then? Is he unworthy of me? Converse with him, and

you will find that the noble form conceals as high a spirit. He wants but wealth; I can give it to him. If his temper is gentle, I can prompt and guide it to fame and power. He, at least, has education, and eloquence, and mind. What has Mr. Vernon?"

"Mr. Vernon, I did not speak of him!"

Lucretia gazed hard upon the Provençal's countenance — gazed with that unpitying air of triumph with which a woman who detects a power over the heart she does not desire to conquer, exults in defeating the reasons that heart appears to her to prompt. "No," she said, in a calm voice, to which the venom of secret irony gave stinging significance — "no, you spoke not of Mr. Vernon; you thought that if I looked round — if I looked nearer — I might have a fairer choice."

"You are cruel — you are unjust," said Dalibard, falteringly. "If I once presumed for a moment, have I repeated my offence? But," he added, hurriedly, "in me — much as you appear to despise me — in me, at least, you would have risked none of the dangers that beset you if you seriously set your heart on Mainwaring."

"You think my uncle would be proud to give my hand to Monsieur Olivier Dalibard?"

"I think and I know," answered the Provençal, gravely, and disregarding the taunt, "that if you had deigned to render me — poor exile that I am! — the most enviable of men, you had still been the heiress of Laughton."

"So you have said and urged," said Lucretia, with evident curiosity in her voice; "yet how, and by what art — wise and subtle as you are — could you have won my uncle's consent?"

"That is my secret," returned Dalibard gloomily; "and since the madness I indulged is for ever over — since I have so schooled my heart, that nothing, despite your sarcasm, save an affectionate interest which I may call paternal, rests there — let us pass from this painful subject. Oh, my dear pupil, be

warned in time! know love for what it really is, in the dark and complicated history of actual life, a brief enchantment, not to be disdained, but not to be considered the all in all. Look round the world, contemplate all those who have married from passion — ten years afterwards, whither has the passion flown? With a few, indeed, where there is community of object and character, new excitements, new aims, and hopes, spring up; and, having first taken root in passion, the passion continues to shoot out in their fresh stems and fibres. But deceive yourself not; there is no such community between you and Mainwaring. What you call his goodness, you will learn hereafter to despise as feeble; and what in reality is your mental power, he soon, too soon, will shudder at as unwomanly and hateful."

"Hold!" cried Lucretia, tremulously. "Hold! and if he does, I shall owe his hate to you — to your lessons — to your deadly influence!"

"Lucretia, no! — the seeds were in you! Can cultivation force from the soil that which it is against the nature of the soil to bear?"

"I will pluck out the weeds! I will transform myself!"

"Child, I defy you!" said the scholar, with a smile, that gave to his face the expression his son had conveyed to it. "I have warned you, and my task is done." With that he bowed, and leaving her, was soon by the side of Sir Miles St. John, and the baronet and his librarian a few moments after, entered the house, and sat down to chess.

But during the dialogues we have sketched, we must not suppose that Sir Miles himself had been so wholly absorbed in the sensual gratification bestowed upon Europe by the immortal Raleigh, as to neglect his guest and kinsman.

"And so, Charley Vernon, it is not the fashion to smoke in Lunnon" (so Sir Miles pronounced the word, according to the

euphuism of his youth, and which, even at that day, still lingered in courtly jargon).

"No, Sir. However, to console us, we have most other vices in full force."

"I don't doubt it: they say the Prince's set exhaust life pretty quickly."

"It certainly requires the fortune of an earl and the constitution of a prize-fighter, to live with him."

"Yet methinks, Master Charley, you have neither one nor the other."

"And therefore I see before me, and at no very great distance, the Bench — and a consumption!" answered Vernon, suppressing a slight yawn.

"'T is a pity; for you had a fine estate properly managed; and, in spite of your faults, you have the heart of a true gentleman. Come, come!" — and the old man spoke with tenderness — "you are young enough yet to reform. A prudent marriage, and a good wife, will save both your health and your acres."

"If you think so highly of marriage, my dear Sir Miles, it is a wonder you did not add to your precepts the value of your example."

"Jackanapes! I had not your infirmities! I never was a spendthrift, and I have a constitution of iron!" There was a pause. "Charles," continued Sir Miles, musingly, "there is many an earl with a less fortune than the conjoined estates of Vernon Grange and Laughton Hall. You must already have understood me — it is my intention to leave my estates to Lucretia — it is my wish, nevertheless, to think you will not be the worse for my will. Frankly, if you can like my niece, win her; settle here while I live, put the Grange to nurse, and recruit yourself by fresh air and field-sports. Zounds, Charles, I love you, and that 's the truth! — Give me your hand!"

"And a grateful heart with it, Sir," said Vernon, warmly, evidently affected, as he started from his indolent position, and took the hand extended to him. "Believe me, I do not covet your wealth, nor do I envy my cousin anything so much as the first place in your regard."

"Prettily said, my boy; and I don't suspect you of insincerity. What think you, then, of my plan?"

Mr. Vernon seemed embarrassed; but, recovering himself with his usual ease, he replied archly, "Perhaps, Sir, it will be of little use to know what I think of your plan; my fair cousin may have upset it already."

"Ha, Sir, let me look at you — so — so! — you are not jesting. What the deuce do you mean? Gad, man, speak out!"

"Do you not think that Mr. Monderling — Mandolin — what 's his name — eh? — do you not think that he is a very handsome young fellow?" said Mr. Vernon, drawing out his snuff-box, and offering it to his kinsman.

"Damn your snuff," quoth Sir Miles, in great choler, as he rejected the proffered courtesy with a vehemence that sent half the contents of the box upon the joint eyes and noses of the two canine favourites dozing at his feet. The setter started up in an agony — the spaniel wheezed and sniffled, and ran off, stopping every moment to take his head between his paws. The old gentleman continued, without heeding the sufferings of his dumb friends — a symptom of rare discomposure on his part:

"Do you mean to insinuate, Mr. Vernon, that my niece — my elder niece, Lucretia Clavering — condescends to notice the looks, good or bad, of Mr. Mainwaring? 'Sdeath, Sir, he is the son of a land-agent! Sir, he is intended for trade! Sir, his highest ambition is to be partner in some fifth-rate mercantile house!"

"My dear Sir Miles," replied Mr. Vernon, as he continued

to brush away, with his scented handkerchief, such portions of the prince's-mixture, as his nankin inexpressibles had diverted from the sensual organs of Dash and Ponto — "my dear Sir Miles, *ça n'empêche pas le sentiment!*"

"*Empêche* the fiddlestick! You don't know Lucretia. There are many girls, indeed, who might not be trusted near any handsome flute-playing spark, with black eyes and white teeth; but Lucretia is not one of those; she has spirit and ambition that would never stoop to a *mésalliance*; she has the mind and will of a queen — old Queen Bess, I believe."

"That is saying much for her talents, Sir; but if so, Heaven help her intended! I am duly grateful for the blessings you propose me!"

Despite his anger, the old gentleman could not help smiling.

"Why, to confess the truth, she is hard to manage; but we, men of the world, know how to govern women, I hope — much less to break in a girl scarce out of her teens. As for this fancy of yours, it is sheer folly — Lucretia knows my mind. She has seen her mother's fate; she has seen her sister an exile from my house — why? for no fault of hers, poor thing! but because she is the child of disgrace, and the mother's sin is visited on the daughter's head. I am a good-natured man, I fancy, as men go; but I am old-fashioned enough to care for my race. If Lucretia demeaned herself to love, to encourage, that lad — why, I would strike her from my will, and put your name where I have placed hers."

"Sir," said Vernon, gravely, and throwing aside all affectation of manner, "this becomes serious; and I have no right even to whisper a doubt by which it now seems I might benefit. I think it imprudent, if you wish Miss Clavering to regard me impartially as a suitor to her hand, to throw her, at her age, in the way of a man far superior to myself, and to most men, in

personal advantages — a man more of her own years, well educated, well mannered, with no evidence of his inferior birth in his appearance or his breeding. I have not the least ground for supposing that he has made the slightest impression on Miss Clavering, and if he has, it would be, perhaps, but a girl's innocent and thoughtless fancy, easily shaken off by time and worldly reflection: but pardon me, if I say bluntly, that should that be so, you would be wholly unjustified in punishing, even in blaming her — it is yourself you must blame for your own carelessness, and that forgetful blindness to human nature and youthful emotions, which, I must say, is the less pardonable in one who has known the world so intimately."

"Charles Vernon," said the old Baronet, "give me your hand, again! I was right, at least, when I said you had the heart of a true gentleman. Drop this subject for the present. Who has just left Lucretia, yonder?"

"Your *protegé* — the Frenchman."

"Ah, *he*, at least, is not blind — go, and join Lucretia!"

Vernon bowed, emptied the remains of the Madeira into a tumbler, drank the contents at a draught, and sauntered towards Lucretia; but she, perceiving his approach, crossed abruptly into one of the alleys that led to the other side of the house; and he was either too indifferent, or too well-bred, to force upon her the companionship which she so evidently shunned. He threw himself at length upon one of the benches in the lawn, and, leaning his head upon his hand, fell into reflections, which, had he spoken, would have shaped themselves somewhat thus into words: —

"If I must take that girl as the price of this fair heritage, shall I gain or lose? I grant that she had the finest neck and shoulders I ever saw out of marble; but far from being in love with her, she gives me a feeling like fear and aversion. Add to this, that she has evidently no kinder sentiment for me than I

for her; and if she once had a heart, that young gentleman has long since coaxed it away. Pleasant auspices, these, for matrimony, to a poor invalid, who wishes at least to decline and to die in peace! Moreover, if I were rich enough to marry as I pleased — if I were what, perhaps, I ought to be, heir to Laughton — why, there is a certain sweet Mary in the world, whose eyes are softer than Lucretia Clavering's: but that is a dream! On the other hand, if I do not win this girl, and my poor kinsman give her all or nearly all his possessions, Vernon Grange goes to the usurers, and the King will find a lodging for myself. What does it matter? I cannot live above two or three years at the most, and can only hope, therefore, that dear stout old Sir Miles may outlive me. At thirty-three, I have worn out fortune and life; little pleasure could Laughton give me; brief pain the Bench. Fore Gad, the philosophy of the thing is on the whole against sour looks and the noose!" Thus deciding in the progress of his reverie, he smiled, and changed his position. The sun had set — the twilight was over — the moon rose in splendour from amidst a thick copse of mingled beech and oak; the beams fell full on the face of the muser, and the face seemed yet paler, and the exhaustion of premature decay yet more evident by that still and melancholy light — all ruins gain dignity by the moon. This was a ruin nobler than that which painters place on their canvas — the ruin, not of stone and brick, but of humanity and spirit; the wreck of man, prematurely old, not stricken by great sorrow, not bowed by great toil, but fretted and mined away by small pleasures and poor excitements — small and poor, but daily, hourly, momently at their gnome-like work. Something of the gravity and the true lesson of the hour and scene, perhaps, forced itself upon a mind little given to sentiment, for Vernon rose languidly, and muttered —

"My poor mother hoped better things from me. It is well, after all, that it is broken off with Mary! Why should there be

any one to weep for me? I can the better die smiling, as I have lived."

Meanwhile, as it is necessary we should follow each of the principal characters we have introduced through the course of an evening more or less eventful in the destiny of all, we return to Mainwaring, and accompany him to the lake at the bottom of the park, which he reached as its smooth surface glistened in the last beams of the sun. He saw, as he neared the water, the fish sporting in the pellucid tide; the dragon-fly darted and hovered in the air; the tedded grass beneath his feet, gave forth the fragrance of crushed thyme and clover; the swan paused, as if slumbering on the wave; the linnet and finch sang still from the neighbouring copses; and the heavy bees were winging their way home with a drowsy murmur; all around were images of that unspeakable peace which Nature whispers to those attuned to her music; all fitted to lull, but not to deject the spirit; images dear to the holyday of the world-worn man, to the contemplation of serene and retired age; to the boyhood of poets; to the youth of lovers. But Mainwaring's step was heavy, and his brow clouded; and Nature that evening was dumb to him. At the margin of the lake stood a solitary angler, who now (his evening's task done) was employed in leisurely disjointing his rod, and whistling with much sweetness an air from one of Isaac Walton's songs. Mainwaring reached the angler, and laid his hand on his shoulder:

"What sport, Ardworth?"

"A few large roach with the fly, and one pike with a gudgeon — a noble fellow! — look at him! He was lying under the reeds yonder; I saw his green back, and teased him into biting. A heavenly evening! I wonder you did not follow my example, and escape from a set, where neither you nor I can feel very much at home, to this green banquet of Nature, in which at least no man sits below the salt-cellar. The birds are an older family

than the St. Johns'; but they don't throw their pedigree in our teeth, Mainwaring."

"Nay, nay, my good friend, you wrong old Sir Miles; proud he is, no doubt, but neither you nor I have had to complain of his insolence."

"Of his insolence! certainly not — of his condescension, yes! Hang it, William, it is his very politeness that galls me. Don't you observe, that with Vernon, or Lord A—, or Lord B—, or Mr. C—, he is easy and off-hand, calls them by their names, pats them on the shoulder, rates them, and swears at them if they vex him; but with you and me and his French parasite, it is all stately decorum and punctilious courtesy: — 'Mr. Mainwaring, I am delighted to see you;' 'Mr. Ardworth, as you are so near, dare I ask you to ring the bell;' 'Mons. Dalibard, with the utmost deference, I venture to disagree with you.' However, don't let my foolish susceptibility ruffle your pride. And you, too, have a worthy object in view, which might well detain you from roach and jack-fish. Have you stolen your interview with the superb Lucretia?"

"Yes, stolen, as you say: and, like all thieves not thoroughly hardened, I am ashamed of my gains."

"Sit down, my boy, this is a bank in ten thousand; there — that old root to lean your elbow on, this soft moss for your cushion: sit down and confess. You have something on your mind that preys on you: we are old college friends — out with it!"

"There is no resisting you, Ardworth," said Mainwaring, smiling, and drawn from his reserve and his gloom by the frank good-humour of his companion: "I should like, I own, to make a clean breast of it; and perhaps I may profit by your advice. You know, in the first place, that after I left College, my father seeing me indisposed for the church, to which he had always destined me in his own heart, and for which, indeed, he had

gone out of his way to maintain me at the University, gave me the choice of his own business as a surveyor and land-agent, or of entering into the mercantile profession. I chose the latter, and went to Southampton, where we have a relation in business, to be initiated into the elementary mysteries. There I became acquainted with a good clergyman and his wife, and in that house I passed a great part of my time."

"With the hope, I trust, on better consideration, of gratifying your father's ambition, and learning how to starve with gentility on a cure."

"Not much of that, I fear."

"Then the clergyman had a daughter?"

"You are nearer the mark now," said Mainwaring, colouring; "though it was not his daughter; a young lady lived in his family, not even related to him, she was placed there with a certain allowance by a rich relation. In a word, I admired, perhaps I loved this young person; but she was without an independence, and I not yet provided even with the substitute of money, a profession. I fancied (do not laugh at my vanity) that my feelings might be returned. I was in alarm for her as well as myself; I sounded the clergyman as to the chance of obtaining the consent of her rich relation, and was informed that he thought it hopeless. I felt I had no right to invite her to poverty and ruin, and still less to entangle further (if I had chanced to touch at all) her affection. I made an excuse to my father to leave the town, and returned home."

"Prudent and honourable enough, so far; unlike me, I should have run off with the girl, if she loved me, and old Plutus, the rascal, might have done his worst against Cupid. But I interrupt you."

"I came back when the county was greatly agitated: public meetings, speeches, mobs — a sharp election going on. My father had always taken keen interest in politics; he was of the

same party as Sir Miles, who, you know, is red-hot upon politics. I was easily led — partly by ambition, partly by the effect of example, partly by the hope to give a new turn to my thoughts — to make an appearance in public."

"And a devilish creditable one, too. Why, man, your speeches have been quoted with rapture by the London papers. Horridly aristocratic and Pittish, it is true; — I think differently; but every man to his taste. Well —"

"My attempts, such as they were, procured me the favour of Sir Miles. He had long been acquainted with my father, who had helped him in his own elections years ago. He seemed cordially delighted to patronise the son: he invited me to visit him at Laughton, and hinted to my father that I was formed for something better than a counting-house: my poor father was intoxicated. In a word, here I am — here, often for days, almost weeks together, have I been, — a guest, always welcomed."

"You pause. This is the primordium — now comes the confession, eh?"

"Why one half the confession is over. It was my most unmerited fortune to attract the notice of Miss Clavering. Do not fancy me so self-conceited as to imagine that I should ever have presumed so high, but for —"

"But for encouragement — I understand! Well, she is a magnificent creature in her way; and I do not wonder that she drove the poor little girl at Southampton out of your thoughts."

"Ah! but there is the sore — I am not sure that she has done so. Ardworth, I may trust you?"

"With everything but half-a-guinea. I would not promise to be rock against so great a temptation;" and Ardworth turned his empty pockets inside out.

"Tush — be serious! — or I go."

"Serious! With pockets like these, the devil 's in it if I am not serious. *Perge, precor.*"

"Ardworth, then," said Mainwaring, with great emotion, "I confide to you the secret trouble of my heart. This girl at Southampton is Lucretia's sister — her half sister: the rich relation on whose allowance she lives is Sir Miles St. John."

"Whew! — my own poor dear little cousin, by the father's side! Mainwaring, I trust you have not deceived me; you have not amused yourself with breaking Susan's heart — for a heart, and an honest, simple, English girl's heart, she has."

"Heaven forbid! — I tell you I have never even declared my love — and if love it were, I trust it is over. But when Sir Miles was first kind to me, first invited me, I own I had the hope to win his esteem, and since he had always made so strong and cruel a distinction between Lucretia and Susan, I thought it not impossible that he might consent at last to my union with the niece he had refused to receive and acknowledge. But even while the hope was in me, I was drawn on — I was entangled — I was spell-bound — I know not how or why; but, to close my confidence, while still doubtful whether my own heart is free from the remembrance of the one sister, I am pledged to the other."

Ardworth looked down gravely and remained silent. He was a joyous, careless, reckless youth, with unsteady character and pursuits and with something of vague poetry, much of unaccommodating pride about his nature — one of those youths little likely to do what is called well in the world — not persevering enough for an independent career — too blunt and honest for a servile one. But it was in the very disposition of such a person to judge somewhat harshly of Mainwaring's disclosure, and not easily to comprehend what, after all, was very natural — how a young man, new to life, timid by character, and of an extreme susceptibility to the fear of giving pain, had, in the surprise, the gratitude, the emotion, of an avowed attachment from a girl, far above him in worldly position, been forced by receiving, to seem, at least, to return her affection. And

indeed though not wholly insensible to the brilliant prospects opened to him in such a connexion, yet, to do him justice, Mainwaring would have been equally entangled, by a similar avowal, from a girl more his equal in the world. It was rather from an amiability bordering upon weakness, than from any more degrading moral imperfections that he had been betrayed into a position which neither contented his heart, nor satisfied his conscience.

With far less ability than his friend, Ardworth had more force and steadiness in his nature, and was wholly free from that morbid delicacy of temperament to which susceptible and shy persons owe much of their errors and misfortunes. He, therefore, after a long pause, said, "My good fellow, to be plain with you, I cannot say that your confession has improved you in my estimation; but that is, perhaps, because of the bluntness of my understanding. I could quite comprehend your forgetting Susan (and, after all, I am left in doubt as to the extent of her conquest over you), for the very different charms of her sister. On the other hand, I could still better understand that having once fancied Susan, you could not be commanded into love for Lucretia. But I do not comprehend your feeling love for one, and making love to the other — which is the long and short of the business."

"That is not exactly the true statement," answered Mainwaring, with a powerful effort at composure. "There are moments when, listening to Lucretia, when charmed by that softness which, contrasting the rest of her character, she exhibits to none but me, struck by her great mental powers, proud of an unsought triumph over such a being, I feel as if I could love none but her; then, suddenly, her mood changes — she utters sentiments that chill and revolt me — the very beauty seems vanished from her face. I recall, with a sigh, the simple sweetness of Susan, and I feel as if I deceived both my mistress and myself.

Perhaps, however, all the circumstances of this connexion tend to remove my doubts. It is humiliating to me to know that I woo clandestinely and upon sufferance, that I am stealing, as it were, into a fortune, that I am eating Sir Miles's bread, and yet counting upon his death; and this shame in myself may make me unconsciously unjust to Lucretia. But it is useless to reprove me for what is past; and though I at first imagined you could advise me for the future, I now see, too clearly, that no advice could avail."

"I grant that, too — for all you require, is to make up your mind to be fairly off with the old love, or fairly on with the new. However, now you have stated your case thus frankly, if you permit me, I will take advantage of the strange chance of finding myself here, and watch, ponder, and counsel, if I can. This Lucretia, I own it, puzzles and perplexes me; but, though no OEdipus, I will not take fright at the Sphynx. I suppose now it is time to return. They expect some of the neighbours to drink tea, and I must doff my fishing-jacket. Come!"

As they strolled towards the house, Ardworth broke a silence which had lasted for some moments:

"And how is that dear good Fielden? I ought to have guessed him at once, when you spoke of your clergyman and his young charge: but I did not know he was at Southampton."

"He has exchanged his living for a year, on account of his wife's health, and rather, I think also, with the wish to bring poor Susan nearer to Laughton, in the chance of her uncle seeing her. But you are, then, acquainted with Fielden?"

"Acquainted! — my best friend. He was my tutor, and prepared me for Caius College. I owe him not only the little learning I have, but the little good that is left in me. I owe to him apparently also, whatever chance of bettering my prospects may arise from my visit at Laughton."

"Notwithstanding our intimacy, we have, like most young

men not related, spoken so little of our family matters, that I do not now understand how you are cousin to Susan; nor what, to my surprise and delight, brought you hither three days ago."

"Faith, my story is easier to explain than your own, William! Here goes!"

But as Ardworth's recital partially involves references to family matters, not yet sufficiently known to the reader, we must be pardoned if we assume to ourselves his task of narrator, and necessarily enlarge on his details.

The branch of the illustrious family of St. John, represented by Sir Miles, diverged from the parent stem of the Lords of Bletshoe. With them it placed at the summit of its pedigree, the name of William de St. John, the Conqueror's favourite and trusted warrior, and Oliva de Filgiers. With them it blazoned the latter alliance, which gave to Sir Oliver St. John the lands of Bletshoe by the hand of Margaret Beauchamp, (by her second marriage with the Duke of Somerset, grandmother to Henry VII.). In the following generation, the younger son of a younger son had founded, partly by offices of state, partly by marriage with a wealthy heiress, a house of his own; and in the reign of James the First, the St. Johns of Laughton ranked amongst the chief gentlemen of Hampshire. From that time till the accession of George III., the family, though it remained untitled, had added to its consequence by intermarriages of considerable dignity, chosen, indeed, with a disregard for money uncommon amongst the English aristocracy, so that the estate was but little enlarged since the reign of James, though profiting, of course, by improved cultivation and the different value of money. On the other hand, perhaps there were scarcely ten families in the country, who could boast of a similar directness of descent on all sides, from the proudest and noblest aristocracy of the soil: and Sir Miles St. John, by blood, was, almost at the distance of eight centuries, as pure a Norman as his ancestral William. His

grandfather, nevertheless, had deviated from the usual disinterested practice of the family, and had married an heiress, who brought the quarterings of Vernon to the crowded escutcheon, and with these quarterings an estate of some £4000 a-year, popularly known by the name of Vernon Grange. This rare occurrence did not add to the domestic happiness of the contracting parties, nor did it lead to the ultimate increase of the Laughton possessions. Two sons were born. To the elder was destined the father's inheritance — to the younger the maternal property. One house is not large enough for two heirs. Nothing could exceed the pride of the father as a St. John, except the pride of the mother as a Vernon. Jealousies between the two sons began early, and rankled deep; nor was there peace at Laughton till the younger had carried away from its rental the lands of Vernon Grange; and the elder remained just where his predecessors stood in point of possessions — sole lord of Laughton, sole. The eldest son, Sir Miles's father, had been, indeed, so chafed by the rivalry with his brother, that in disgust he had run away, and thrown himself, at the age of fourteen, into the navy. By accident or by merit he rose high in that profession, acquired name and fame, and lost an eye and an arm, — for which he was gazetted, at the same time, an admiral and a baronet.

Thus mutilated and dignified, Sir George St. John retired from the profession; and finding himself unmarried, and haunted by the apprehension that if he died childless, Laughton would pass to his brother's heirs, he resolved upon consigning his remains to the nuptial couch, previous to the surer peace of the family vault. At the age of fifty-six, the grim old veteran succeeded in finding a young lady of unblemished descent, and much marked with the small-pox, who consented to accept the only hand which Sir George had to offer. From this marriage sprang a numerous family; but all died in early childhood, frightened to death, said the neighbours, by their tender parents

(considered the ugliest couple in the county), except one boy (the present Sir Miles) and one daughter, many years younger, destined to become Lucretia's mother. Sir Miles came early into his property; and although the softening advance of civilization, with the liberal effects of travel, and a long residence in cities, took from him that provincial austerity of pride, which is only seen in stanch perfection amongst the lords of a village, he was yet little less susceptible to the duties of maintaining his lineage pure as its representation had descended to him, than the most superb of his predecessors. But owing, it was said, to an early disappointment, he led, during youth and manhood, a roving and desultory life, and so put off from year to year the grand experiment matrimonial, until he arrived at old age, with the philosophical determination to select from the other branches of his house the successor to the heritage of St. John. In thus arrogating to himself a right to neglect his proper duties as head of a family, he found his excuse in adopting his niece Lucretia. His sister had chosen for her first husband a friend and neighbour of his own, a younger son, of unexceptionable birth, and of very agreeable manners in society. But this gentleman contrived to render her life so miserable, that, though he died fifteen months after their marriage, his widow could scarcely be expected to mourn long for him. A year after Mr. Clavering's death, Mrs. Clavering married again, under the mistaken notion that she had the right to choose for herself. She married Dr. Mivers, the provincial physician who had attended her husband in his last illness — a gentleman by education, manners, and profession, but unhappily the son of a silk-mercer. Sir Miles never forgave this connexion. By her first marriage, Sir Miles's sister had one daughter, Lucretia; by her second marriage, another daughter, named Susan. She survived somewhat more than a year the birth of the latter: on her death, Sir Miles formally (through his agent) applied to Dr. Mivers for his

eldest niece, Lucretia Clavering, and the physician did not think himself justified in withholding from her the probable advantages of a transfer from his own roof to that of her wealthy uncle. He himself had been no worldly gainer by his connexion; his practice had suffered materially from the sympathy which was felt by the county families for the supposed wrongs of Sir Miles St. John, who was personally not only popular, but esteemed, nor less so on account of his pride: too dignified to refer even to his domestic annoyances, except to his most familiar associates — to them, indeed, Sir Miles had said briefly, that he considered a physician who abused his entrance into a noble family by stealing into its alliance, was a character in whose punishment all society had an interest. The words were repeated: they were thought just. Those who ventured to suggest that Mrs. Clavering, as a widow, was a free agent, were regarded with suspicion. It was the time when French principles were just beginning to be held in horror, especially in the provinces, and when everything that encroached upon the rights and prejudices of the high-born, was called "a French principle." Dr. Mivers was as much scouted as if he had been a *sans-culotte*. Obliged to quit the county, he settled at a distance; but he had a career to commence again; his wife's death enfeebled his spirits, and damped his exertions. He did little more than earn a bare subsistence, and died at last, when his only daughter was fourteen, poor and embarrassed. On his deathbed he wrote a letter to Sir Miles, reminding him that, after all, Susan was his sister's child, gently vindicating himself from the unmerited charge of treachery which had blasted his fortunes, and left his orphan penniless; and closing with a touching, yet a manly appeal to the sole relative left to befriend her. The clergyman who had attended him in his dying moments, took charge of this letter; he brought it in person to Laughton, and delivered it to Sir Miles. Whatever his errors, the old baronet was no common man. He was not

vindictive, though he could not be called forgiving. He had considered his conduct to his sister a duty owed to his name and ancestors; she had placed herself and her youngest child out of the pale of his family. He would not receive as his niece the granddaughter of a silk-mercer. The relationship was extinct, as, in certain countries, nobility is forfeited by a union with an inferior class. But niece or not, here was a claim to humanity and benevolence; and never yet had appeal been made by suffering to his heart and purse in vain.

He bowed his head over the letter as his eye came to the last line, and remained silent so long, that the clergyman, at last, moved and hopeful, approached and took his hand. It was the impulse of a good man and a good priest. Sir Miles looked up in surprise; but the calm pitying face bent on him, repelled all return of pride.

"Sir," he said, tremulously, and he pressed the hand that grasped his own, "I thank you. I am not fit at this moment to decide what to do: to-morrow, you shall know. And the man died poor? not in want, not in want?"

"Comfort yourself, worthy Sir; he had, at the last, all that sickness and death require, except one assurance, which I ventured to whisper to him — I trust not too rashly — that his daughter would not be left unprotected. And I pray you to reflect, my dear Sir, that —"

Sir Miles did not wait for the conclusion of the sentence; he rose abruptly, and left the room. Mr. Fielden (so the good priest was named) felt confident of the success of his mission; but, to win it the more support, he sought Lucretia. She was then seventeen: it is an age when the heart is peculiarly open to the household ties — to the memory of a mother — to the sweet name of sister. He sought this girl, he told his tale, and pleaded the sister's cause. Lucretia heard in silence; neither eye nor lip betrayed emotion; but her colour went and came.

This was the only sign that she was moved: moved, but how? Fielden's experience in the human heart could not guess. When he had done, she went quietly to her desk (it was in her own room that the conference took place) — she unlocked it with a deliberate hand — she took from it a pocket-book and a case of jewels, which Sir Miles had given her on her last birth-day. "Let my sister have these — while I live she shall not want!"

"My dear young lady, it is not these things that she asks from you, it is your affection, your sisterly heart, your intercession with her natural protector; these, in her name, I ask for — *non gemmis neque purpurâ venale, nec auro!*"

Lucretia then, still without apparent emotion, raised to the good man's face, deep, penetrating, but unrevealing eyes, and said, slowly: —

"Is my sister like my mother, who, they say, was handsome?"

Much startled by this question, Fielden answered — "I never saw your mother, my dear; but your sister gives promise of more than common comeliness."

Lucretia's brows grew slightly compressed. "And her education has been, of course, neglected?"

"Certainly, in some points — mathematics, for instance, and theology. But she knows what ladies generally know — French and Italian, and such like. Dr. Mivers was not unlearned in the pólite letters. Oh, trust me, my dear young lady, she will not disgrace your family; she will justify your uncle's favour. Plead for her!" — and the good man clasped his hands.

Lucretia's eyes fell musingly on the ground; but she resumed, after a short pause,

"What does my uncle himself say?"

"Only that he will decide to-morrow."

"I will see him;" and Lucretia left the room as for that object. But when she had gained the stairs, she paused at the large embayed casement, which formed a niche in the landing-place, and gazed over the broad domains beyond; a stern smile settled, then, upon her lips; the smile seemed to say — "In this inheritance I will have no rival."

Lucretia's influence with Sir Miles was great; but here it was not needed. Before she saw him he had decided on his course. Her precocious, and apparently intuitive knowledge of character, dedected, at a glance, the safety with which she might intercede. She did so, and was chid into silence.

The next morning, Sir Miles took the priest's arm, and walked with him into the gardens.

"Mr. Fielden," he said, with the air of a man who has chosen his course, and deprecates all attempt to make him swerve from it, "if I followed my own selfish wishes, I should take home this poor child. Stay, Sir, and hear me — I am no hypocrite, and I speak honestly — I like young faces — I have no family of my own; — I love Lucretia, and I am proud of her, but a girl brought up in adversity might be a better nurse, and a more docile companion — let that pass. I have reflected, and I feel that I cannot set to Lucretia — set to children unborn — the example of indifference to a name degraded and a race adulterated: you may call this pride, or prejudice — I view it differently. There are duties due from an individual, duties due from a nation, duties due from a family; as my ancestors thought, so think I. They left me the charge of their name, as the fief-rent by which I hold their lands. 'Sdeath, Sir! pardon me the expletive! — I was about to say, that if I am now a childless old man, it is because I have myself known temptation, and resisted. I loved, and denied myself what I believed my best chance of happiness, because the object of my attachment was not my equal — that was a bitter struggle — I triumphed,

and I rejoice at it, though the result was to leave all thoughts of wedlock elsewhere odious and repugnant. These principles of action have made a part of my creed as gentleman, if not as Christian — now, to the point. I beseech you to find a fitting and reputable home for Miss — Miss Mivers (the lip slightly curled as the name was said) — I shall provide suitably for her maintenance. When she marries, I will dower her, provided only, and always, that her choice fall upon one who will not still further degrade her lineage on her mother's side, — in a word, if she select a *gentleman*. Mr. Fielden, on this subject I have no more to say."

In vain the good clergyman, whose very conscience, as well as reason, was shocked by the deliberate and argumentative manner with which the baronet had treated the abandonment of his sister's child as an absolutely moral, almost religious duty, — in vain he exerted himself to repel such sophisms, and put the matter in its true light. It was easy for him to move Sir Miles's heart — *that* was ever gentle — *that* was moved already; but the crotchet in his head was impregnable. The more touchingly he painted poor Susan's unfriended youth, her sweet character, and promising virtues, the more Sir Miles St. John considered himself a martyr to his principles, and the more obstinate in the martyrdom he became. "Poor thing! poor child!" he said often, and hrushed a tear from his eyes; "a thousand pities! Well, well, I hope she will be happy! Mind, money shall never stand in the way if she have a suitable offer!" This was all the worthy clergyman, after an hour's eloquence, could extract from him. Out of breath, and out of patience, he gave in at last; and the baronet, still holding his reluctant arm, led him back towards the house. After a prolonged pause, Sir Miles said abruptly: "I have been thinking that I may have unwittingly injured this man — this Mivers — while I deemed only that he injured me. As to reparation to his daughter, that is settled; and, after all,

though I do not publicly acknowledge her, she is half my own niece."

"Half?"

"Half—the father's side don't count, of course; and, rigidly speaking, the relationship is, perhaps, forfeited on the other. However, that half of it I grant. Zooks, Sir, I say I grant it! — I beg you ten thousand pardons for my vehemence. To return, perhaps I can show at least that I bear no malice to this poor doctor. He has relations of his own — silk-mercers — trade has reverses. How are they off?"

Perfectly perplexed by this very contradictory and paradoxical, yet, to one better acquainted with Sir Miles, very characteristic benevolence, Fielden was some time before he answered. "Those members of Dr. Mivers's family who are in trade are sufficiently prosperous; they have paid his debts; *they*, Sir Miles, will receive his daughter."

"By no means!" cried Sir Miles, quickly; then recovering himself, he added, "or, if you think that advisable, of course all interference on my part is withdrawn."

"*Festina lente!* — not so quick, Sir Miles. I do not yet say that it is advisable — not because they are silk-mercers, the which, I humbly conceive, is no sin to exclude them from gratitude for their proffered kindness, but because Susan, poor child! having been brought up in different habits, may feel a little strange, at least at first, with —"

"Strange, yes; I should hope so!" interrupted Sir Miles, taking snuff with much energy; "and, by the way, I am thinking that it would be well if you and Mrs. Fielden — you are married, Sir? — that is right — clergymen all marry! — if you and Mrs. Fielden would take charge of her yourselves, it would be a great comfort to me to think her so well placed. We differ, Sir — but I respect you. Think of this. Well, then, the doctor has left no relations that I can aid in any way?"

"Strange man!" muttered Fielden. "Yes; I must not let one poor youth lose the opportunity offered by your — your —"

"Never mind what — proceed — one poor youth; in the shop, of course?"

"No; and by his father's side (since you so esteem such vanities) of an ancient family — a sister of Dr. Mivers married Captain Ardworth."

"Ardworth — a goodish name — Ardworth, of Yorkshire."

"Yes, of that family. It was, of course, an imprudent marriage, contracted while he was only an ensign. His family did not reject him, Sir Miles."

"Sir, Ardworth is a good squire's family, but the name is Saxon; there is no difference in race between the head of the Ardworths, if he were a duke, and my gardener, John Hodge — Saxon and Saxon, both. *His* family did not reject him — go on."

"But he was a younger son in a large family — both himself and his wife have known all the distresses common, they tell me, to the poverty of a soldier, who has no resource but his pay. They have a son; Dr. Mivers — though so poor himself — took this boy, for he loved his sister dearly, and meant to bring him up to his own profession. Death frustrated this intention. The boy is high-spirited and deserving."

"Let his education be completed — send him to the university; and I will see that he is put into some career, of which his father's family would approve. You need not mention to any one my intentions in this respect, not even to the lad. And now, Mr. Fielden, I have done my duty — at least, I think so. The longer you honour my house, the more I shall be pleased and grateful; but this topic, allow me most resnectfully to say, needs

and bears no further comment. Have you seen the last news from the army?"

"The army! — oh, fie, Sir Miles, I must speak one word more — may not my poor Susan have, at least, the comfort to embrace her sister?"

Sir Miles mused a moment, and struck his crutch-stick thrice firmly on the ground.

"I see no great objection to that; but, by the address of this letter, the poor girl is too far from Laughton, to send Lucretia to her."

"I can obviate that objection, Sir Miles. It is my wish to continue to Susan her present home amongst my own children — my wife loves her dearly; and had you consented to give her the shelter of your own roof, I am sure I should not have seen a smile in the house for a month after. If you permit this plan, as indeed you honoured me by suggesting it, I can pass through Southampton, on my way to my own living in Devonshire, and Miss Clavering can visit her sister there."

"Let it be so," said Sir Miles, briefly; and so the conversation closed.

Some weeks afterwards, Lucretia went in her uncle's carriage, with four post-horses, with her maid and her footman — went in the state and pomp of heiress to Laughton — to the small lodging-house in which the kind pastor crowded his children, and his young guest. She stayed there some days. She did not weep when she embraced Susan—she did not weep when she took leave of her; but she showed no want of actual kindness, though the kindness was formal and stately. On her return, Sir Miles forbore to question; but he looked as if he expected, and would willingly permit, her to speak on what might naturally be uppermost at her heart. Lucretia, however, remained silent, till at

last the baronet colouring, as if ashamed of his curiosity, said —

"Is your sister like your mother?"

"You forget, Sir, I can have no recollection of my mother."

"Your mother had a strong family likeness to myself."

"She is not like you — they say she is like Dr. Mivers."

"Oh!" said the baronet, and he asked no more. The sisters did not meet again: a few letters passed between them, but the correspondence gradually ceased.

Young Ardworth went to college, prepared by Mr. Fielden, who was no ordinary scholar, and an accurate and profound mathematician — a more important requisite than classical learning in a tutor for Cambridge. But Ardworth was idle, and perhaps even dissipated. He took a common degree, and made some debts, which were paid by Sir Miles, without a murmur. A few letters then passed between the baronet and the clergyman, as to Ardworth's future destiny; the latter owned that his pupil was not persevering enough for the bar, nor steady enough for the church. These were no great faults in Sir Miles's eyes. He resolved, after an effort, to judge himself of the capacities of the young man, and so came the invitation to Laughton. Ardworth was greatly surprised when Fielden communicated to him this invitation, for hitherto he had not conceived the slightest suspicion of his benefactor — he had rather, and naturally, supposed that some relation of his father's had paid for his maintenance at the university; and he knew enough of the family history to look upon Sir Miles as the proudest of men. How was it, then, that he who would not receive the daughter of Dr. Mivers, his own niece, would invite the nephew of Dr. Mivers, who was no relation to him? However, his curiosity was excited, and Fielden was urgent that he should go; — to Laughton, therefore, had he gone.

We have now brought down, to the opening of our narrative, the general records of the family it concerns; we have reserved our account of the rearing and the character of the personage most important, perhaps, in the development of its events — Lucretia Clavering; in order to place singly before the reader, the portrait of her dark, misguided, and ill-boding youth.

CHAPTER II.

LUCRETIA.

When Lucretia first came to the house of Sir Miles St. John, she was an infant about four years old. The baronet then lived principally in London, with occasional visits rather to the Continent or a watering-place, than to his own family mansion. He did not pay any minute attention to his little ward — satisfied that her nurse was sedulous, and her nursery airy and commodious. When at the age of seven, she began to interest him, and he himself, approaching old age, began seriously to consider, whether he should select her as his heiress, for hitherto he had not formed any decided or definite notions on the matter — he was startled by a temper so vehement, so self-willed and sternly imperious, so obstinately bent upon attaining its object, so indifferently contemptuous of warning, reproof, coaxing, or punishment, that her governess honestly came to him in despair.

The management of this unmanageable child interested Sir Miles. It caused him to think of Lucretia seriously; it caused him to have her much in his society, and always in his thoughts; the result was, that by amusing and occupying him, she forced a stronger hold on his affections than she might have done, had she been more like the ordinary run of commonplace children. Of all dogs, there is no dog that so attaches a master as a dog that snarls at everybody else, — that no other hand can venture to pat with impunity; of all horses, there is none which so flatters the rider, from Alexander downwards, as a horse that nobody else can ride. Extend this principle to the human

species, and you may understand why Lucretia became so dear to Sir Miles St. John — she got at his heart through his vanity. For though, at times, her brow darkened, and her eye flashed even at his remonstrance, she was yet no sooner in his society, than she made a marked distinction between him and the subordinates, who had hitherto sought to control her. Was this affection? — he thought so. Alas, what parent can trace the workings of a child's mind — springs moved by an idle word from a nurse — a whispered conference between hirelings! Was it possible that Lucretia had not often been menaced, as the direst evil that could befal her, with her uncle's displeasure; that long before she could be sensible of mere worldly loss or profit, she was not impressed with a vague sense of Sir Miles's power over her fate; nay, when trampling, in childish wrath and scorn, upon some menial's irritable feelings, was it possible that she had not been told that, but for Sir Miles, she would be little better than a servant herself? Be this as it may, all weakness is prone to dissimulate; and rare and happy is the child whose feelings are as pure and transparent as the fond parent deems them. There is something in children, too, which seems like an instinctive deference to the aristocratic appearances which sway the world. Sir Miles's stately person — his imposing dress, the respect with which he was surrounded — all tended to beget notions of superiority and power, to which it was no shame to succumb, as it was to Miss Black, the governess, whom the maids answered pertly, or Martha, the nurse, whom Miss Black snubbed, if Lucretia tore her frock.

Sir Miles's affection once won — his penetration not perhaps blinded to her more evident faults, but his self-love soothed towards regarding them leniently — there was much in Lucretia's external gifts which justified the predilection of the haughty man. As a child, she was beautiful, and, perhaps, from her very imperfections of temper, her beauty had that air of distinction

which the love of command is apt to confer. If Sir Miles was with his friends when Lucretia swept into the room, he was pleased to hear them call her their little "princess," and pleased yet more at a certain dignified tranquillity with which she received their caresses or their toys, and which he regarded as the sign of a superior mind: nor was it long, indeed, before what we call a superior mind developed itself in the young Lucretia. All children are quick till they are set methodically to study; but Lucretia's quickness defied even that numbing ordeal, by which half of us are rendered dunces. Rapidity and precision in all the tasks set to her, — in the comprehension of all the explanations given to her questions, evinced singular powers of readiness and reasoning.

As she grew older, she became more reserved and thoughtful. Seeing but few children of her own age, and mixing intimately with none, her mind was debarred from the usual objects which distract the vivacity, the restless and wondrous observation, of childhood. She came in and out of Sir Miles's library of a morning, or his drawing-room of an evening till her hour for rest, with unquestioned and sometimes unnoticed freedom; she listened to the conversation around her, and formed her own conclusions unchecked. It has a great influence upon a child, whether for good or for evil, to mix early and habitually with those grown up — for good to the mere intellect always — the evil depends upon the character and discretion of those the child sees and hears — "*Maxima reverentia debet liberis*," — "The greatest reverence is due to children!" exclaims the wisest of the Romans; that is to say, that we must revere the candour and inexperience, and innocence of their minds.

Now, Sir Miles's habitual associates were persons of the world; well-bred and decorous, indeed, before children, as the best of the old school were — avoiding all anecdotes, all allusions, for which the prudent matron would send her girls out

of the room; but, with that reserve, speaking of the world as the world goes; if talking of young A—, calculating carelessly what he would have when old A—, his father, died — naturally giving to wealth, and station, and ability, their fixed importance in life — not over-apt to single out for eulogium some quiet goodness, rather inclined to speak with irony of pretensions to virtue — rarely speaking but with respect of the worldly seemings which rule mankind; — all these had their inevitable effect upon that keen, quick, yet moody and reflective intellect.

Sir Miles removed at last to Laughton. He gave up London — why, he acknowledged not to himself; but it was because he had outlived his age — most of his old set were gone — new hours, new habits had stolen in. He had ceased to be of importance as a marrying man, as a personage of fashion; his health was impaired; he shrank from the fatigues of a contested election; he resigned his seat in Parliament for his native county, and, once settled at Laughton, the life there soothed and flattered him — there, all his former claims to distinction were still fresh. He amused himself by collecting, in his old halls and chambers, his statues and pictures, and felt that, without fatigue or trouble, he was a greater man at Laughton in his old age, than he had been in London during his youth.

Lucretia was then thirteen. Three years afterwards, Olivier Dalibard was established in the house, and from that time a great change became noticeable in her. The irregular vehemence of her temper gradually subsided, and was replaced by an habitual self-command, which rendered the rare deviations from it more effective and imposing. Her pride changed its character wholly and permanently; no word, no look of scorn to the low-born and the poor escaped her. The masculine studies which her erudite tutor opened to a grasping and inquisitive mind, elevated her very errors above the petty distinctions of class. She

imbibed earnestly what Dalibard assumed or felt, — the more dangerous pride of the fallen angel, — and set up the intellect as a deity. All belonging to the mere study of mind charmed and enchained her; but active and practical in her very reveries, if she brooded, it was to scheme, to plot, to weave web and mesh, and to smile in haughty triumph at her own ingenuity and daring. The first lesson of mere worldly wisdom teaches us to command temper; it was worldly wisdom that made the once-impetuous girl calm, tranquil, and serene. Sir Miles was pleased by a change that removed from Lucretia's outward character its chief blot; perhaps, as his frame declined, he sighed sometimes to think that with so much majesty there appeared but little tenderness; he took, however, the merits with the faults, and was content upon the whole.

If the Provençal had taken more than common pains with his young pupil, the pains were not solely disinterested. In plunging her mind amidst that profound corruption which belongs only to intellect cultivated in scorn of good, and in suppression of heart, he had his own views to serve. He watched the age when the passions ripen; and he grasped at the fruit which his training sought to mature. In the human heart ill regulated there is a dark desire for the forbidden. This Lucretia felt — this her studies cherished, and her thoughts brooded over. She detected, with the quickness of her sex, the Preceptor's stealthy aim. She started not at the danger. Proud of her mastery over herself, she rather triumphed in luring on into weakness this master-intelligence, which had lighted up her own, — to see her slave in her teacher — to despise or to pity him whom she had first contemplated with awe. And with this mere pride of the understanding might be connected that of the sex; she had attained the years when woman is curious to know and to sound her power. To inflame Dalibard's cupidity or ambition was easy; but to touch his *heart* — that marble heart! — this had its dignity and

its charm. Strange to say, she succeeded. The passion, as well as interests, of this dangerous and able man became enlisted in his hopes; and now the game played between them had a terror in its suspense; for if Dalibard penetrated not into the recesses of his pupil's complicated nature, she was far from having yet sounded the hell that lay black and devouring beneath his own. Not through her affections — those he scarce hoped for — but through her inexperience, her vanity, her passions, he contemplated the path to his victory over her soul and her fate. And so resolute, so wily, so unscrupulous was this person who had played upon all the subtlest keys and chords in the scale of turbulent life, that, despite the lofty smile with which Lucretia at length heard and repelled his suit, he had no fear of the ultimate issue, — when all his projects were traversed, — all his mines and stratagems abruptly brought to a close, by an event which he had wholly unforeseen — the appearance of a rival; the ardent and almost purifying love, which, escaping awhile from all the demons he had evoked, she had, with a girl's frank heart and impulse, conceived for Mainwaring. And here, indeed, was the great crisis in Lucretia's life and destiny. So interwoven with her nature had become the hard calculations of the understanding; so habitual to her now was the zest for scheming, which revels in the play and vivacity of intrigue and plot, and which Shakspeare has, perhaps, intended chiefly to depict in the villany of Iago, that it is probable Lucretia could never become a character thoroughly amiable and honest. But with a happy and well-placed love, her ambition might have had legitimate vents; her restless energies, the woman's natural field in sympathies for another. The heart once opened softens by use: gradually and unconsciously the interchange of affection, the companionship with an upright and ingenuous mind (for virtue is not only beautiful, it is contagious) might have had their redeeming and hallowing influence. Happier, indeed, had it been, if her

choice had fallen upon a more commanding and lofty nature. But, perhaps, it was the very meekness and susceptibility of Mainwaring's temper, relieved from feebleness by his talents, which, once in play, were undeniably great, that pleased her by contrast with her own hardness of spirit and despotism of will.

That Sir Miles should have been blind to the position of the lovers, is less disparaging to his penetration than it may appear; for the very imprudence with which Lucretia abandoned herself to the society of Mainwaring during his visits at Laughton, took a resemblance to candour. Sir Miles knew his niece to be more than commonly clever and well informed, that she, like him, should feel that the conversation of a superior young man was a relief to the ordinary babble of their country neighbours, was natural enough; and if now and then a doubt, a fear, had crossed his mind, and rendered him more touched than he liked to own by Vernon's remarks, it had vanished upon perceiving that Lucretia never seemed a shade more pensive in Mainwaring's absence. The listlessness and the melancholy which are apt to accompany love, especially where unpropitiously placed, were not visible on the surface of this strong nature. In truth, once assured that Mainwaring returned her affection, Lucretia reposed on the future with a calm and resolute confidence; and her customary dissimulation closed like an unruffled sea over all the under-currents that met and played below. Still Sir Miles's attention once, however slightly, aroused to the recollection that Lucretia was at the age when woman naturally meditates upon love and marriage, had suggested, afresh and more vividly, a project which had before been indistinctly conceived — viz., the union of the divided branches of his house, by the marriage of the last male of the Vernons with the heiress of the St. Johns. Sir Miles had seen much of Vernon himself, at various intervals; he had been present at his christening, though he had refused to be his godfather, for fear of raising undue expectations;

he had visited and munificently 'tipped' him at Eton; he had accompanied him to his quarters when he joined the Prince's regiment; he had come often in contact with him, when, at the death of his father, Vernon retired from the army and blazed in the front ranks of metropolitan fashion; he had given him counsel and had even lent him money. Vernon's spendthrift habits, and dissipated if not dissolute life, had certainly confirmed the old baronet in his intentions to trust the lands of Laughton to the lesser risk which property incurs in the hands of a female, if tightly settled on her, than in the more colossal and multiform luxuries of an expensive man; and to do him justice, during the flush of Vernon's riotous career, he had shrunk from the thought of confiding the happiness of his niece to so unstable a partner. But of late, whether from his impaired health, or his broken fortunes, Vernon's follies had been less glaring. He had now arrived at the mature age of thirty-three, when wild oats may reasonably be sown. The composed and steadfast character of Lucretia, might serve to guide and direct him; and Sir Miles was one of those who hold the doctrine that a reformed rake makes the best husband; add to this, there was nothing in Vernon's reputation (once allowing that his thirst for pleasure was slaked) which could excite serious apprehensions. Through all his difficulties, he had maintained his honour unblemished, a thousand traits of amiability and kindness of heart made him popular and beloved. He was nobody's enemy but his own. His very distresses — the prospect of his ruin, if left unassisted by Sir Miles's testamentary dispositions — were arguments in his favour. And, after all, though Lucretia was a nearer relation, Vernon was in truth the direct male heir, and, according to the usual prejudices of family, therefore, the fitter representative of the ancient line. With these feelings and views, he had invited Vernon to his house, and we have seen already that his favourable impressions had been confirmed by the visit.

And here, we must say, that Vernon himself had been brought up in boyhood and youth to regard himself the presumptive inheritor of Laughton. It had been, from time immemorial, the custom of the St. Johns to pass by the claims of females in the settlement of the entails: from male to male the estate had gone — furnishing warriors to the army, and senators to the state. And if when Lucretia first came to Sir Miles's house, the bright prospect seemed somewhat obscured, still the *mésalliance* of the mother, and Sir Miles's obstinate resentment thereat, seemed to warrant the supposition that he would probably only leave to the orphan, the usual portion of a daughter of the house, and that the lands would go in their ordinary destination. This belief, adopted passively, and as a thing of course, had had a very prejudicial effect upon Vernon's career. What mattered that he over-enjoyed his youth, that the subordinate property of the Vernons, a paltry four or five thousand pounds a-year, went a little too fast — the splendid estates of Laughton would recover all. From this dream he had only been awakened two or three years before, by an attachment he had formed to the portionless daughter of an earl; and the Grange being too far encumbered to allow him the proper settlements which the lady's family required; it became a matter of importance to ascertain Sir Miles's intentions. Too delicate himself to sound them, he had prevailed upon the earl, who was well acquainted with Sir Miles, to take Laughton in his way to his own seat in Dorsetshire, and, without betraying the grounds of his interest in the question, learn carelessly, as it were, the views of the wealthy man. The result had been a severe and terrible disappointment. Sir Miles had then fully determined upon constituting Lucretia his heiress, and, with the usual openness of his character, he had plainly said so, upon the very first covert and polished allusion to the subject, which the earl slily made. This discovery, in breaking off all hopes of an union with Lady Mary Stanville,

had crushed more than mercenary expectations. It affected, through his heart, Vernon's health and spirits; it rankled deep and was resented at first as a fatal injury. But Vernon's native nobility of disposition gradually softened an indignation which his reason convinced him was groundless and unjust. Sir Miles had never encouraged the expectations, which Vernon's family and himself had unthinkingly formed. The baronet was master of his own fortune, and after all was it not more natural that he should prefer the child he had brought up and reared, to a distant relation, little more than an acquaintance, simply because man succeeded to man in the mouldy pedigree of the St. Johns? And Mary fairly lost to him, his constitutional indifference to money, a certain French levity of temper, a persuasion that his life was nearing its wasted close, had left him without regret, as without resentment, at his kinsman's decision. His boyish affection for the hearty, generous old gentleman returned, and though he abhorred the country, he had without a single interested thought or calculation, cordially accepted the baronet's hospitable overtures, and deserted, for the wilds of Hampshire, "the sweet shady side of Pall Mall."

We may now enter the drawing-room at Laughton, in which were already assembled several of the families residing in the more immediate neighbourhood, and who sociably dropped in to chat around the national tea-table, play a rubber at whist, or make up, by the help of two or three children and two or three grandpapas, a merry country dance. For, in that happy day, people were much more sociable than they are now, in the houses of our rural Thanes. Our country seats became bustling and animated after the Birthday; many even of the more important families resided, indeed, all the year round on their estates; the Continent was closed to us. The fastidious exclusiveness which comes from habitual residence in cities, had not made that demarcation in castes and in talk, between neighbour and neigh-

bour, which exists now. Our squires were less educated, less refined, but more hospitable and unassuming. In a word there was what does not exist now, except in some districts remote from London, — a rural society for those who sought it.

The party, as we enter, is grouped somewhat thus — but first, we must cast a glance at the room itself, which rarely failed to be the first object to attract a stranger's notice. It was a long, and not particularly well-proportioned apartment, according, at least, to modern notions, for it had rather the appearance of two rooms thrown into one. At the distance of about thirty-five feet, the walls before somewhat narrow, were met by an arch, supported by carved pilasters, which opened into a space nearly double the width of the previous part of the room, with a domed ceiling, and an embayed window of such depth, that the recess almost formed a chamber in itself. But both these divisions of the apartment corresponded exactly in point of decoration; they had the same small panelling, painted a very light green, which seemed almost white by candle-light, each compartment wrought with an arabesque, the same enriched frieze and cornice; they had the same high mantel-pieces, ascending to the ceiling, with the arms of St. John in bold relief. They had, too, the same old-fashioned and venerable furniture, draperies of thick figured velvet, with immense chairs and sofas to correspond, interspersed, it is true, with more modern and commodious inventions of the upholsterer's art, in grave stuffed leather, or lively chintz. Two windows, nearly as deep as that in the further division, broke the outline of the former one, and helped to give that irregular and *nooky* appearance to the apartment, which took all discomfort from its extent, and furnished all convenience for solitary study, or detached flirtation. With little respect for the carved work of the panels, the walls were covered with pictures brought by Sir Miles from Italy; here and there marble busts and statues gave lightness to the character of the room, and har-

monized well with that half-Italian mode of decoration which belongs to the period of James the First. The shape of the chamber, in its divisions, lent itself admirably to that friendly and sociable intermixture of amusements which reconciles the tastes of young and old. In the first division, near the fire-place, Sir Miles, seated in his easy chair, and sheltered from the opening door by a sevenfold tapestry screen, was still at chess with his librarian. At a little distance, a middle-aged gentleman, and three turbaned matrons, were cutting in at whist — shilling points — with a half-crown bet, optional, and not much ventured on. On tables, drawn into the recesses of the windows, were the day's newspapers, Gilray's caricatures, the last new publications, and such other ingenious suggestions to chit-chat. And round these tables grouped those who had not yet found elsewhere their evening's amusement; two or three shy young clergymen, the parish doctor, four or five squires, who felt great interest in politics, but never dreamt of the extravagance of taking in a daily paper, and who now, monopolizing all the journals they could find, began fairly with the heroic resolution to skip nothing, from the first advertisement to the printer's name. Amidst one of these groupes, Mainwaring had bashfully ensconced himself. In the further division, the chandelier, suspended from the domed ceiling, threw its cheerful light over a large circular table below, on which gleamed the ponderous tea-urn of massive silver, with its usual accompaniments. Nor were wanting there, in addition to those airy nothings, sliced infinitesimally, from a French roll, the more substantial, and now exiled cheer, of cakes — plum and seed, Yorkshire and saffron — attesting the light hand of the housekeeper, and the strong digestion of the guests. Round this table were seated, in full gossip, the maids and the matrons, with a slight sprinkling of the bolder young gentlemen who had been taught to please the fair. The warmth of the evening allowed the upper casement to

be opened and the curtains drawn aside, and the July moonlight feebly struggled against the blaze of the lights within. At this table it was Miss Clavering's obvious duty to preside; but that was a complaisance to which she rarely condescended. Nevertheless, she had her own way of doing the honour of her uncle's house, which was not without courtesy and grace; — to glide from one to the other, exchange a few friendly words, see that each set had its well-known amusements, and, finally, sit quietly down to converse with some who, from gravity or age, appeared most to neglect, or be neglected by the rest, was her ordinary, and not unpopular mode of welcoming the guests at Laughton — *not* unpopular, for she thus avoided all interference with the flirtations and conquests of humbler damsels, whom her station and her endowments might otherwise have crossed or humbled, while she ensured the good word of the old, to whom the young are seldom so attentive. But if a stranger of more than provincial repute chanced to be present, if some stray member of parliament, or barrister on the circuit, or wandering artist, accompanied any of the neighbours, to him Lucretia gave more earnest and undivided attention. Him she sought to draw into a conversation deeper than the usual babble, and with her calm, searching eyes, bent on him while he spoke, seemed to fathom the intellect she set in play. But as yet, this evening, she had not made her appearance — a sin against etiquette very unusual in her. Perhaps her recent conversation with Dalibard had absorbed her thoughts to forgetfulness of the less important demands on her attention. Her absence had not interfered with the gaiety at the tea-table, which was frank even to noisiness; as it centered round the laughing face of Ardworth, who, though unknown to most or all of the ladies present, beyond a brief introduction to one or two of the first comers from Sir Miles (as the host had risen from his chess to bid them welcome), had already contrived to make himself perfectly at home, and outrageously popular.

Niched between two bouncing lasses, he had commenced acquaintance with them in a strain of familiar drollery and fun, which had soon broadened its circle, and now embraced the whole groupe in the happy contagion of good humour and young animal spirits. Gabriel, allowed to set up later than his usual hour, had not, as might have been expected, attached himself to this circle, nor indeed to any; he might be seen moving quietly about — now contemplating the pictures on the wall with a curious eye — now pausing at the whist-table, and noting the game with the interest of an embryo gamester — now throwing himself on an ottoman, and trying to coax towards him Dash or Ponto — trying in vain, for both the dogs abhorred him; yet still, through all this general movement, had any one taken the pains to observe him closely, it might have been sufficiently apparent that his keen, bright, restless eye, from the corner of its long sly lids, roved chiefly towards the three persons whom he approached the least — his father, Mainwaring, and Mr. Vernon. This last had ensconced himself apart from all, in the angle formed by one of the pilasters of the arch that divided the room, so that he was in command, as it were, of both sections. Reclined, with the careless grace that seemed inseparable from every attitude and motion of his person, in one of the great velvet chairs, with a book in his hand, which, to say truth, was turned upside down, but in the lecture of which he seemed absorbed — he heard at one hand the mirthful laughter that circled round young Ardworth, or, in its pauses, caught on the other side, muttered exclamations from the grave whist-players — "If you had but trumped that diamond, Ma'am!" — "Bless me, Sir, it was the best heart!" And somehow or other, both the laughter and the exclamations affected him alike, with what then was called "the spleen" — for the one reminded him of his own young days of joyless, careless mirth, of which his mechanical gaiety now was but a mocking ghost, and the other seemed a

satire, a parody, on the fierce but noiseless rapture of gaming, through which his passions had passed — when thousands had slipped away with a bland smile, provoking not one of those natural ebullitions of emotion which there accompanied the loss of a shilling point. And besides this, Vernon had been so accustomed to the success of the drawing-room, to be a somebody and a something in the company of wits and princes, that he felt, for the first time, a sense of insignificance in this provincial circle. Those fat squires had heard nothing of Mr. Vernon, except that he would not have Laughton — he had no acres, no vote in their county — he was a nobody to them. Those ruddy maidens, though now and then, indeed, one or two might steal an admiring glance at a figure of elegance so unusual, regarded him not with the female interest he had been accustomed to inspire. They felt instinctively that he could be nothing to them, nor they to him — a mere London fop, and not half so handsome as Squires Bluff and Chuff.

Rousing himself from this little vexation to his vanity, with a conscious smile at his own weakness, Vernon turned his looks towards the door, waiting for Lucretia's entrance, and since her uncle's address to him, feeling that new and indescribable interest in her appearance, which is apt to steal into every breast, when what was before but an indifferent acquaintance, is suddenly enhaloed with the light of a possible wife. At length, the door opened, and Lucretia entered. Mr. Vernon lowered his book, and gazed with an earnestness that partook both of doubt and admiration.

Lucretia Glavering was tall — tall beyond what is admitted to be tall in woman; but in her height there was nothing either awkward or masculine — a figure more perfect never served for model to a sculptor. The dress at that day, unbecoming as we now deem it, was not to her — at least, on the whole — disadvantageous. The short waist gave greater sweep to her majestic

length of limb, while the classic thinness of the drapery betrayed the exact proportion and the exquisite contour. The arms then were worn bare almost to the shoulder, and Lucretia's arms were not more faultless in shape than dazzling in their snowy colour — the stately neck, the falling shoulders, the firm, slight, yet rounded bust — all would have charmed equally the artist and the sensualist. Fortunately, the sole defect of her form was not apparent at a distance: that defect was in the hand; it had not the usual faults of female youthfulness — the superfluity of flesh, the too rosy healthfulness of colour; on the contrary, it was small and thin, but it was, nevertheless, more the hand of a man than a woman; the shape had a man's nervous distinctness, the veins swelled like sinews, the joints of the fingers were marked and prominent. In that hand, it almost seemed as if the iron force of the character betrayed itself. But as we have said, this slight defect which few, if seen, would hypercritically notice, could not of course be perceptible as she moved slowly up the room; and Vernon's eye, glancing over the noble figure rested upon the face. Was it handsome? — was it repelling? Strange that in feature it had pretensions to the highest order of beauty, and yet, even that experienced connoisseur in female charms was almost puzzled what sentence to pronounce. The hair, as was the fashion of the day, clustered in profuse curls over the forehead, but could not conceal a slight line or wrinkle between the brows; and this line, rare in women at any age, rare even in men at hers, gave an expression at once of thought and sternness to the whole face. The eyebrows themselves were straight, and not strongly marked, — a shade or two perhaps too light, a fault still more apparent in the lashes; the eyes were large, full, and, though bright, astonishingly calm and deep, at least in ordinary moments; yet withal, they wanted the charm of that steadfast and open look, which goes at once to the heart, and invites its trust; their expression was rather vague and abstracted. She

usually looked aslant while she spoke, and this, which with some appears but shyness, in one so self-collected, had an air of falsehood. But when, at times, if earnest, and bent rather on examining those she addressed than guarding herself from penetration, she fixed those eyes upon you with sudden and direct scrutiny, the gaze impressed you powerfully, and haunted you with a strange spell. The eye itself was of a peculiar and displeasing colour — not blue, nor gray, nor black, nor hazel, but rather of that catlike green, which is drowsy in the light, and vivid in the shade. The profile was purely Greek, and so seen, Lucretia's beauty seemed incontestable; but in front face, and still more when inclined between the two, all the features took a sharpness, that, however regular, had something chilling and severe; the mouth was small, but the lips were thin and pale, and had an expression of effort and contraction, which added to the distrust that her sidelong glance was calculated to inspire. The teeth were dazzlingly white, but sharp and thin, and the eye-teeth were much longer than the rest. The complexion was pale, but without much delicacy; the paleness seemed not natural to it, but rather that hue which study and late vigils give to men; so that she wanted the freshness and bloom of youth, and looked older than she was — an effect confirmed by an absence of roundness in the cheek, not noticeable in the profile, but rendering the front face somewhat harsh as well as sharp. In a word, the face and the figure were not in harmony; the figure prevented you from pronouncing her to be masculine — the face took from the figure the charm of feminacy. It was the head of the young Augustus upon the form of Agrippina. One touch more, and we close a description, which already perhaps the reader may consider frivolously minute. If you had placed before the mouth and lower part of the face a mask or bandage, the whole character of the upper face would have changed at once; the eye lost its glittering falseness, the brow its sinister

contraction; you would at once have pronounced the face not only beautiful, but sweet and womanly. Take that bandage suddenly away, and the change would have startled you, and startled you the more, because you could detect no sufficient defect or disproportion in the lower part of the countenance to explain it. It was as if the mouth was the key to the whole: the key nothing without the text, the text uncomprehended without the key.

Such, then, was Lucretia Clavering in outward appearance, at the age of twenty—striking to the most careless eye—interesting and perplexing the student in that dark language, never yet deciphered, — the human countenance. The reader must have observed, that the effect every face that he remarks for the first time produces, is different from the impression it leaves upon him when habitually seen. Perhaps, no two persons differ more from each other, than does the same countenance in our earliest recollection of it from the countenance regarded in the familiarity of repeated intercourse. And this was especially the case with Lucretia Clavering's; the first impulse of nearly all who beheld it was distrust that partook of fear; it almost inspired you with a sense of danger. The judgment rose up against it; the heart set itself on its guard. But this uneasy sentiment soon died away with most observers, in admiration at the chiselled outline, which, like the Grecian sculpture, gained the more, the more it was examined; in respect for the intellectual power of the expression; and in fascinated pleasure at the charm of a smile, rarely employed, it is true, but the more attractive, both for that reason and for its sudden effect in giving brightness and persuasion to an aspect that needed them so much. It was literally like the abrupt breaking out of a sunbeam; and the repellant impression of the face, thus familiarized away, the matchless form took its natural influence; so that, while one who but saw Lucretia for a moment, might have pronounced her almost plain,

and certainly not prepossessing in appearance, those with whom she lived, those whom she sought to please, those who saw her daily, united in acknowledgment of her beauty; and if they still felt awe, attributed it only to the force of her understanding.

As she now came midway up the room, Gabriel started from his seat, and ran to her caressingly. Lucretia bent down, and placed her hand upon his fair locks. As she did so, he whispered —

"Mr. Vernon has been watching for you."

"Hush! Where is your father?"

"Behind the screen, at chess with Sir Miles."

"With Sir Miles!" and Lucretia's eye fell with the direct gaze we have before referred to, upon the boy's face.

"I have been looking over them pretty often," said he, meaningly: "they have talked of nothing but the game."

Lucretia lifted up her head, and glanced round with her furtive eye; the boy divined the search, and with a scarce perceptible gesture, pointed her attention to Mainwaring's retreat. Her vivid smile passed over her lips, as she bowed slightly to her lover, and then withdrawing the hand which Gabriel had taken in his own, she moved on, passed Vernon with a commonplace word or two, and was soon exchanging greetings with the gay merry-makers in the farther part of the room. A few minutes afterwards, the servants entered, the tea-table was removed, chairs thrust back — a single lady of a certain age volunteered her services at the piano, and dancing began within the ample space which the arch fenced off from the whist-players. Vernon had watched his opportunity, and at the first sound of the piano had gained Lucretia's side, and with grave politeness pre-engaged her hand for the opening dance.

At that day, though it is not so very long ago, gentlemen were not ashamed to dance, and to dance well; it was no languid

saunter through a quadrille; it was fair, deliberate, skilful dancing, amongst the courtly; free, bounding movement amongst the gay.

Vernon, as might be expected, was the most admired performer of the evening; but he was thinking very little of the notice he at last excited; he was employing such ingenuity as his experience of life supplied to the deficiencies of a very imperfect education, limited to the little flogged into him at Eton, in deciphering the character and getting at the heart of his fair partner.

"I wonder you do not make Sir Miles take you to London, my cousin, if you will allow me to call you so. You ought to have been presented."

"I have no wish to go to London yet."

"Yet!" said Mr. Vernon, with the somewhat *fade* gallantry of his day; "beauty even like yours has little time to spare."

"Hands across, hands across!" cried Mr. Ardworth.

"And," continued Mr. Vernon, as soon as a pause was permitted to him, "there is a song which the Prince sings, written by some sensible old-fashioned fellow, which says —

"'Gather your rosebuds while you may,
For Time is still a-flying.'"

"You have obeyed the moral of the song yourself, I believe, Mr. Vernon."

"Call me cousin, or Charles — Charley, if you like — as most of my friends do: nobody ever calls me Mr. Vernon; I don't know myself by that name."

"Down the middle, we are all waiting for you," shouted Ardworth.

And down the middle with wondrous grace glided the exquisite nankins of Charley Vernon.

The dance now, thanks to Ardworth, became too animated and riotous to allow more than a few broken monosyllables till Vernon and his partner gained the end of the set, and then, flirting his partner's fan, he recommenced —

"Seriously, my cousin, you must sometimes feel very much moped here."

"Never!" answered Lucretia. Not once yet had her eye rested on Mr. Vernon. She felt that she was sounded.

"Yet I am sure you have a taste for the pomps and vanities. Aha! there is ambition under those careless curls," said Mr. Vernon, with his easy adorable impertinence.

Lucretia winced.

"But if I were ambitious, what field for ambition could I find in London?"

"The same as Alexander — empire, my cousin."

"You forget that I am not a man. Man, indeed, may hope for an empire. It is something to be a Pitt, or even a Warren Hastings."

Mr. Vernon stared. Was this stupidity, or what?

"A woman has an empire more undisputed than Mr. Pitt's, and more pitiless than that of Governor Hastings."

"Oh, pardon me, Mr. Vernon —"

"Charles, if you please."

Lucretia's brow darkened.

"Pardon me," she repeated; "but these compliments, if such they are meant to be, meet a very ungrateful return. A woman's empire over gauzes and ribbons, over tea-tables and drums, over fops and coquettes, is not worth a journey from Laughton to London."

"You think you can despise admiration?"

"What you mean by admiration — yes."

"And love, too?" said Vernon, in a whisper.

Now Lucretia at once and abruptly raised her eyes to her partner. Was he aiming at her secret? — was he hinting at intentions of his own? The look chilled Vernon, and he turned away his head.

Suddenly, then, in pursuance of a new train of ideas, Lucretia altered her manner to him. She had detected what before she had surmised. This sudden familiarity on his part arose from notions her uncle had instilled — the visiter had been incited to become the suitor. Her penetration into character, which from childhood had been her passionate study, told her that on that light, polished, fearless nature, scorn would have slight effect — to meet the familiarity would be the best means to secure a friend, to disarm a wooer. She changed then her manner: she summoned up her extraordinary craft; she accepted the intimacy held out to her, not to unguard herself, but to lay open her opponent. It became necessary to her to know this man, to have such power as the knowledge might give her. Insensibly and gradually she led her companion away from his design of approaching her own secrets or character, into frank talk about himself. All unconsciously he began to lay bare to his listener the infirmities of his erring, open heart. Silently she looked down, and plumbed them all: the frivolity, the recklessness, the half gay, half mournful sense of waste and ruin. There, blooming amongst the wrecks, she saw the fairest flowers of noble manhood, profuse and fragrant still — generosity and courage, and disregard for self. Spendthrift and gambler, on one side the medal; gentleman and soldier, on the other. Beside this maimed and imperfect nature, she measured her own prepared and profound intellect, and as she listened, her smile became more bland and frequent. She could afford to be gracious; she felt superiority, scorn, and safety.

As this seeming intimacy had matured, Vernon and his partner had quitted the dance, and were conversing apart in the

recess of one of the windows, which the newspaper readers had deserted, in the part of the room where Sir Miles and Dalibard, still seated, were about to commence their third game at chess. The baronet's hand ceased from the task of arranging his pawns, his eye was upon the pair, and then, after a long and complacent gaze, it looked round without discovering the object it sought.

"I am about to task your kindness most improperly, Monsieur Dalibard," said the baronet, with that politeness so displeasing to Ardworth, "but will you do me the favour to move aside that fold of the screen. I wish for a better view of our young people. Thank you very much."

Sir Miles now discovered Mainwaring, and observed that far from regarding with self-betraying jealousy the apparent flirtation going on between Lucretia and her kinsman, he was engaged in animated conversation with the chairman of the quarter sessions. Sir Miles was satisfied, and ranged his pawns. All this time, and indeed ever since they had sat down to play, the Provençal had been waiting with the patience that belonged to his character, for some observation from Sir Miles on the subject, which his sagacity perceived was engrossing his thoughts. There had been about the old gentleman a fidgety restlessness, which showed that something was on his mind. His eyes had been frequently turned towards his niece since her entrance; once or twice he had cleared his throat and hemmed, — his usual prelude to some more important communication; and Dalibard had heard him muttering to himself, and fancied he caught the name of "Mainwaring." And, indeed the baronet had been repeatedly on the verge of sounding his secretary, and as often had been checked both by pride in himself and pride for Lucretia. It seemed to him beneath his own dignity and hers even to hint to an inferior a fear, a doubt of the heiress of Laughton. Olivier Dalibard could easily have led on his patron — he could easily,

if he pleased it, have dropped words to instil suspicion and prompt question, but that was not his object; he rather shunned than courted any reference to himself upon the matter; for he knew that Lucretia, if she could suppose that he, however indirectly, had betrayed her to her uncle, would at once declare his own suit to her, and so procure his immediate dismissal; while aware of her powers of dissimulation, and her influence over her uncle, he feared that a single word from her would suffice to remove all suspicion in Sir Miles, however ingeniously implanted, and however truthfully grounded. But all the while, under his apparent calm, his mind was busy, and his passions burning.

"Pshaw, your old play — the bishop again!" said Sir Miles, laughing, as he moved a knight to frustrate his adversary's supposed plan; and then turning back, he once more contemplated the growing familiarity between Vernon and his niece. This time he could not contain his pleasure: "Dalibard, my dear Sir," he said, rubbing his hands, "look yonder; they would make a handsome couple!"

"Who, Sir?" said the Provençal, looking another way, with dogged stupidity.

"Who? damn it, man! nay, pray forgive my ill manners— but I felt glad, Sir, and proud, Sir. Who? Charley Vernon and Lucretia Clavering."

"Assuredly, yes. Do you think that there is a chance of so happy an event?"

"Why, it depends only on Lucretia. I shall never force her." Here Sir Miles stopped, for Gabriel, unperceived before, picked up his patron's pocket handkerchief.

Olivier Dalibard's gray eyes rested coldly on his son. "You are not dancing to-night, my boy. Go; I like to see you amused."

The boy obeyed at once, as he always did, the paternal commands. — He found a partner, and joined a dance just began; and in the midst of the dance, Honoré Gabriel Varney seemed a new being: not Ardworth himself so thoroughly entered into the enjoyment of the exercise, the lights, the music. With brilliant eyes and dilated nostrils, he seemed prematurely to feel all that is exciting and voluptuous in that exhilaration, which to childhood is usually so *naive* and innocent. His glances followed the fairest form; his clasp lingered in the softest hand; his voice trembled as the warm breath of his partner came on his cheeks.

Meanwhile, the conversation between the chess-players continued.

"Yes," said the baronet, "it depends only on Lucretia, — and she seems pleased with Vernon; who would not be?"

"Your penetration rarely deceives you, Sir. I own I think with you. Does Mr. Vernon know that you would permit the alliance?"

"Yes; but —" the baronet stopped short.

"You were saying, but — but what, Sir Miles?"

"Why the dog affected diffidence; he had some fear lest he should not win her affections — but luckily, at least, they are disengaged."

Dalibard looked grave, and his eye, as if involuntarily, glanced towards Mainwaring. As ill luck would have it, the young man had then ceased his conversation with the chairman of the quarter sessions, and with arms folded, brow contracted, and looks, earnest, anxious, and intent, was contemplating the whispered conference between Lucretia and Vernon.

Sir Miles's eye had followed his secretary's, and his face changed. His hand fell on the chess-board, and upset half the men; he uttered a very audible "Zounds!"

"I think, Sir Miles," said the Provençal, rising as if conscious that Sir Miles wished to play no more — "I think that if you spoke soon to Miss Clavering, as to your views with regard to Mr. Vernon, it might ripen matters; for I have heard it said by French mothers — and our French women understand the female heart, Sir — that a girl having no other affection is often prepossessed at once in favour of a man, whom she knows before-hand is prepared to woo and to win her, whereas without that knowledge, he would have seemed but an ordinary acquaintance."

"It is shrewdly said, my dear Monsieur Dalibard; and for more reasons than one, the sooner I speak to her the better. Lend me your arm — it is time for supper — I see the dance is over."

Passing by the place where Mainwaring still leant; the baronet looked at him fixedly. The young man did not notice the gaze. Sir Miles touched him gently. He started as from a reverie:

"You have not danced, Mr. Mainwaring."

"I dance so seldom, Sir Miles," said Mainwaring, colouring.

"Ah! you employ your head more than your heels, young gentleman; very right — I must speak to you to-morrow. Well, ladies, I hope you have enjoyed yourselves. My dear Mrs. Vesey, you and I are old friends, you know — many a minuet we have danced together, eh! We can't dance now — but we can walk arm in arm together still. Honour me. And your little grandson — vaccinated, eh! Wonderful invention! To supper, ladies — to supper!"

The company were gone. The lights were out, all save the lights of Heaven, and they came bright and still through the casements: Moonbeam and Starbeam, they seemed now to have the old house to themselves. In came the rays, brighter and longer

and bolder — like fairies that march, rank upon rank, into thei kingdom of solitude. Down the oak stairs, from the casements, blazoned with heraldry, moved the rays, creepingly, fearfully On the armour in the hall, clustered the rays boldly and brightly, till the steel shone out like a mirror. In the library, long and low, they just entered, stopped short — it was no place for their play. In the drawing-room, now deserted, they were more curious and adventurous. Through the large window, still open, they came in freely and archly, as if to spy what had caused such disorder; the stiff chairs out of place, the smooth floor spoiled of its carpet — that flower dropped on the ground — that scarf forgotten on the table — the rays lingered, upon them all. Up and down, through the house, from the base to the roof, roved the children of the air, — and found but two spirits awake amidst the slumber of the rest.

In that tower to the east — in the tapestry chamber — with the large gilded bed in the recess, came the rays, tamed and wan, as if scared by the grosser light on the table. By that table sat a girl, her brow leaning on one hand; in the other she held a rose — it is a love-token — exchanged with its sister rose, by stealth — in mute sign of reproach for doubt excited — an assurance and a reconciliation. A love-token! — shrink not, ye rays — there is something akin to ye in love. But, see, the hand closes convulsively on the flower — it hides it not in the breast — it lifts it not to the lip; — it throws it passionately aside. "How long!" muttered the girl, impetuously — "how long! and to think that *will* here cannot shorten an hour!" Then she rose, and walked to and fro, and each time she gained a certain niche in the chamber, she paused, and then irresolutely passed on again. What is in that niche? Only books. What can books teach thee, pale girl? The step treads firmer; this time it halts more resolved. The hand that clasped the flower takes down a volume. The girl sits again before the light. See,

oh, rays, what is the volume? Moon and Starbeam, ye love what lovers read by the lamp in the loneliness. No love-ditty this; no yet holier lesson to patience and moral to hope. What hast thou, young girl, with thy strong health and rich years, with the lore of the leech, — with prognostics, and symptoms, and diseases? She is tracing with hard eyes the signs that precede the grim enemy, in his most sudden approach — the habits that invite him, the warnings that he gives. He whose wealth shall make her free, has twice had the visiting shock — he starves not—he lives free! She closes the volume, and, musing. metes him out the hours and days he has to live. Shrink back, ye rays! The love is disenhallowed: while the hand was on the rose the thought was on the charnel.

Yonder, in the opposite tower, in the small casement near the roof, came the rays; Childhood is asleep. Moon and Starbeam, ye love the slumbers of the child! The door opens — a dark figure steals noiselessly in. The father comes to look on the sleep of his son. Holy tenderness, if this be all!

"Gabriel, wake!" said a low, stern voice, and a rough hand shook the sleeper.

The sharpest test of those nerves, upon which depends the mere animal courage, is to be roused suddenly in the depth of night, by a violent hand. The impulse of Gabriel, thus startled, was neither of timidity nor surprise. It was that of some boy Spartan, not new to danger: with a slight cry, and a fierce spring, the son's hand clutched at the father's throat. Dalibard shook him off with an effort, and a smile half in approval, half in irony, played by the moonlight over his lips.

"Blood will out, young tiger," said he. "Hush, and hear me!"

"Is it you, father," said Gabriel; "I thought, — I dreamed —"

"No matter; think — dream always, that man should be prepared for defence from peril!"

"Gabriel, (and the pale scholar seated himself on the bed,) turn your face to mine — nearer; let the moon fall on it; lift your eyes — look at me — so! Are you not playing false to me? Are you not Lucretia's spy, while you are pretending to be mine? It is so; your eye betrays you. Now, heed me; you have a mind beyond your years. Do you love best the miserable garret in London, the hard fare and squalid dress, — or your lodgement here, the sense of luxury, the sight of splendour, the atmosphere of wealth? You have the choice before you."

"I choose as you would have me, then," said the boy — "the last."

"I believe you. Attend! you do not love me — that is natural — you are the son of Clara Varney! You have supposed that in loving Lucretia Clavering, you might vex or thwart me, you scarce knew how; and Lucretia Clavering has gold and gifts, and soft words, and promises, to bribe withal. I now tell you openly my plan with regard to this girl: it is my aim to marry her — to be master of this house and these lands. If I succeed, you share them with me. By betraying me, word or look, to Lucretia, you frustrate this aim; you plot against our rise and to our ruin. Deem not that you could escape my fall; if I am driven hence — as you might drive me — you share my fate; and, mark me, you are delivered up to my revenge! You cease to be my son — you are my foe. Child! you know me."

The boy, bold as he was, shuddered; but after a pause, so brief that a breath scarce passed between his silence and his words, he replied, with emphasis:

"Father, you have read my heart. I have been persuaded by Lucretia (for she bewitches me), to watch you — at least, when you are with Sir Miles. I knew that this was mixed up with Mr.

Mainwaring. Now that you have made me understand your own views, I will be true, to you — true without threats."

The father looked hard on him, and seemed satisfied with the gaze. "Remember, at least, that your future rests upon your truth: *that* is no threat — that is a thought of hope. Now sleep or muse on it." He dropped the curtain which his hand had drawn aside, and stole from the room as noiselessly as he had entered. The boy slept no more. Deceit, and cupidity, and corrupt ambition, were at work in his brain. Shrink back, Moon and Starbeam! On that child's brow play the demons who had followed the father's step to his bed of sleep.

Back to his own room, close at hand, crept Olivier Dalibard. The walls were lined with books — many in language and deep in lore. Moon and Starbeam, ye love the midnight solitude of the scholar! The Provençal stole to the casement, and looked forth. All was serene; breathless trees, and gleaming sculpture, and whitened sward, girdled by the mass of shadow. Of what thought the man? not of the present loveliness which the scene gave to his eye, nor of the future mysteries which the stars should whisper to the soul. Gloomily over a stormy and a hideous past, roved the memory, stored with fraud and foul with crime; plan upon plan, schemed with ruthless wisdom, followed up by remorseless daring, and yet all now a ruin and a blank! — an intellect at war with good, and the good had conquered! But the conviction neither touched the conscience, nor enlightened the reason; he felt, it is true, a moody sense of impotence, but it brought rage, not despondency: it was not that he submitted to Good, as too powerful to oppose, but that he deemed he had not yet gained all the mastery over the arsenal of Evil. And evil he called it not. Good or evil to him were but subordinate genii, at the command of Mind; they were the slaves of the lamp. But had he got at the true secret of the lamp itself? "How is it," he thought, as he turned impatiently from

the casement, "that I am baffled here, where my fortunes seemed most assured? Here the mind has been of my own training, and prepared by nature to my hand; — here all opportunity has smiled. And suddenly the merest commonplace, in the vulgar lives of mortals — an unlooked for rival — rival, too, of the mould I had taught her to despise — one of the stock gallants of a comedy — no character, but youth and fair looks; yea, the lover of the stage starts up, and the fabric of years is overthrown." As he thus mused, he placed his hand upon a small box on one of the tables. "Yet, within this," resumed his soliloquy, and he struck the lid, that gave back a dull sound, — "within this I hold the keys of life and death! Fool, the power does not reach to the heart, except to still it. Verily and indeed were the old heathens mistaken? Are there no philtres to change the current of desire? — but touch one chord in a girl's affection, and all the rest is mine — all — all, lands, station, power — all the rest are in the opening of this lid!"

Hide in the cloud, O Moon! — shrink back ye Stars! send not your holy, pure, and trouble-lulling light to the countenance blanched and livid with the thoughts of murder.

CHAPTER III.

CONFERENCES

THE next day Sir Miles did not appear at breakfast, not that he was unwell, but that he meditated holding certain audiences, and on such occasions the good old gentleman liked to prepare himself. He belonged to a school in which amidst much that was hearty and convivial, there was much also that, now-a-days, would seem stiff and formal, contrasting the other school immediately succeeding him, which Mr. Vernon represented, and of which the Charles Surface of Sheridan is a faithful and admirable type. The room that Sir Miles appropriated to himself was, properly speaking, the state apartment, called, in the old inventories, "King James's chamber;" it was on the first floor, communicating with the picture gallery, which, at the farther end opened upon a corridor, admitting to the principal bedrooms. As Sir Miles cared nothing for holiday state, he had unscrupulously taken his *cubiculum* in this chamber, which was really the handsomest in the house, except the banquet hall; placed his bed in one angle, with a huge screen before it, filled up the space with his Italian antiques and curiosities, and fixed his favourite pictures on the faded gilt leather pannelled on the walls. His main motive in this was the communication with the adjoining gallery, which, when the weather was unfavourable, furnished ample room for his habitual walk. He knew how many strides by the help of his crutch made a mile, and this was convenient. Moreover he liked to look, when alone, on those old portraits of his ancestors, which he had religiously conserved in their places, preferring to thrust his Florentine and Venetian

masterpieces into bedrooms and parlours rather than to dislodge from the gallery the stiff ruffs, doublets, and fardingales of his predecessors. It was whispered in the house, that the baronet whenever he had to reprove a tenant, or lecture a dependant, took care to have him brought to his sanctum, through the full length of this gallery, so that the victim might be duly prepared and awed by the imposing effect of so stately a journey, and the grave faces of all the generations of St. John, which could not fail to impress him with the dignity of the family, and alarm him at the prospect of the injured frown of its representative. Across this gallery now, following the steps of the powdered valet, strode young Ardworth; staring now and then at some portrait more than usually grim, more often wondering why his boots that never creaked before, should creak on those particular boards, and feeling a quiet curiosity without the least mixture of fear or awe, as to what old Square-toes intended to say to him. But all feeling of irreverence ceased when, shown into the baronet's room, and the door closed, Sir Miles rose with a smile and cordially shaking his hand, said, dropping the punctilious courtesy of Mister — "Ardworth, Sir, if I had a little prejudice against you, before you came, you have conquered it. You are a fine manly, spirited fellow, Sir; and you have an old man's good wishes, which are no bad beginning to a young man's good fortunes."

The colour rushed over Ardworth's forehead, and a tear sprang to his eyes. He felt a rising at his throat, as he stammered out some not very audible reply.

"I wished to see you, young gentleman, that I might judge myself what you would like best, and what would best fit you — your father is in the army. What say you to a pair of colours?"

"Oh, Sir Miles, that is my utmost ambition! Anything but

law, except the church; anything but the church, except a desk and a counter!"

The baronet, much pleased, gave him a gentle pat on the shoulder. "Ha, ha! *we* gentlemen, you see (for the Ardworths are very well born — very) *we*, *gentlemen*, understand each other! Between you and me, I never liked the law — never thought a man of birth should belong to it — take money for lying — shabby — shocking! Don't let that go any further! The church — Mother Church — I honour her! Church and state go together! But one ought to be very good to preach to others — better than you and I are — eh, eh? ha, ha! Well, then, you like the army — there 's a letter for you to the Horse Guards — go up to town — your business is done; and, as for your outfit — read this little book at your leisure." And Sir Miles thrust a pocket-book into Ardworth's hand.

"But pardon me," said the young man, much bewildered. "What claim have I, Sir Miles, to such generosity; I know that my uncle offended you."

"Sir, that 's the claim!" said Sir Miles, gravely. "I cannot live long!" he added, with a touch of melancholy in his voice; "let me die in peace with all! — perhaps I injured your uncle! Who knows but, if so, he hears and pardons me now?"

"Oh, Sir Miles!" exclaimed the thoughtless, generous-hearted young man, "and my little play-fellow, Susan — your own niece!"

Sir Miles drew back haughtily; but the burst that offended him rose so evidently from the heart, was so excusable from its motive, and the youth's ignorance of the world, that his frown soon vanished, as he said, calmly and gravely —

"No man, my good Sir, can allow to others the right to touch on his family affairs; I trust I shall be just to the poor young lady; and so, if we never meet again, let us think well

of each other. Go, my boy! serve your king and your country!"

"I will do my best, Sir Miles, if only to merit your kindness."

"Stay a moment: you are intimate, I find, with young Mainwaring?"

"An old college friendship, Sir Miles."

"The army won't do for him, eh?"

"He is too clever for it, Sir."

"Ah, he 'd make a lawyer, I suppose — glib tongue enough! and can talk well, — and lie, if he 's paid for it?"

"I don't know how lawyers regard those matters, Sir Miles; but if you don't make him a lawyer, I am sure you must leave him an honest man."

"Really and truly —"

"Upon my honour I think so."

"Good day to you, and good luck. You must catch the coach at the lodge; for, I see by the papers, that, in spite of all the talk about Peace, they are raising regiments like wildfire."

With very different feelings from those with which he had entered the room Ardworth quitted it. He hurried into his own chamber to thrust his clothes into his portmanteau, and, while thus employed, Mainwaring entered.

"Joy, my dear fellow! wish me joy! I am going to town — into the army — abroad — to be shot at, thank Heaven! That dear old gentleman! — just throw me that coat, will you?"

A very few more words sufficed to explain what had passed to Mainwaring; he sighed when his friend had finished: "I wish I were going with you!"

"Do you? Sir Miles has only got to write another letter to the Horse Guards; but no, you are meant to be something better than food for powder; and, besides, your Lucretia! Hang it, I am sorry I cannot stay to examine her as I had promised; but I

have seen enough to know that she certainly loves you. Ah, when she changed flowers with you, you did not think I saw you — sly, was not I? Pshaw! she was only playing with Vernon! But still, do you know, Will, now that Sir Miles has spoken to me so, that I could have sobbed — 'God bless you, my old boy!' — 'pon my life, I could! — now, do you know, that I feel enraged with you for abetting that girl to deceive him."

"I am enraged with myself; and —" Here a servant entered, and informed Mainwaring that he had been searching for him — Sir Miles requested to see him in his room. Mainwaring started like a culprit. "Never fear," whispered Ardworth, "he has no suspicion of you, I 'm sure. Shake hands; when shall we meet again? Is it not odd, I, who am a Republican by theory, taking King George's pay to fight against the French? No use stopping now to moralize on such contradictions. John — Tom, what 's your name — here, my man, here, throw that portmanteau on your shoulder, and come to the lodge." And so, full of health, hope, vivacity, and spirit, John Walter Ardworth departed on his career.

Meanwhile, Mainwaring slowly took his way to Sir Miles. As he approached the gallery, he met Lucretia, who was coming from her own room. "Sir Miles has sent for me," he said, meaningly. He had time for no more, for the valet was at the door of the gallery, waiting to usher him to his host.

"Ha! you will say not a word that can betray us; guard your looks, too!" whispered Lucretia, hurriedly; "afterwards, join me by the cedars." She passed on towards the staircase, and glanced at the large clock that was placed there. "Past eleven; Vernon is never up before twelve. I must see him before my uncle sends for me, as he will send if he suspects —" She paused, went back to her room, rang for her maid, dressed as for walking, and said, carelessly, "If Sir Miles wants me, I am gone to the rectory, and shall probably return by the village,

so that I shall be back about one." Towards the rectory, indeed, Lucretia bent her way; but half way there, turned back, and passing through the plantation at the rear of the house, awaited Mainwaring on the bench beneath the cedars. He was not long before he joined her. His face was sad and thoughtful, and when he seated himself by her side, it was with a weariness of spirit that alarmed her.

"Well," said she, fearfully, and she placed her hand on his.

"Oh, Lucretia," he exclaimed, as he pressed that hand, with an emotion that came from other passions than love, "we, or rather, *I*, have done great wrong. I have been leading you to betray your uncle's trust, to convert your gratitude to him into hypocrisy. I have been unworthy of myself. I am poor — I am humbly born; but, till I came here, I was rich and proud in honour. I am not so now. Lucretia, pardon me — pardon me! let the dream be over — we must not sin thus; for it is sin, and the worst of sin — treachery. We must part: forget me!"

"Forget you! never, never, never!" cried Lucretia, with suppressed, but most earnest vehemence — her breast heaving, her hands, as he dropped the one he held, clasped together, her eyes full of tears — transformed at once into softness, meekness, even while racked by passion and despair.

"Oh, William, say anything — reproach, chide, despise me, for mine is all the fault; say anything but that word — 'part.' I have chosen you, I have sought you out, I have wooed you if you will; be it so. I cling to you — you are my all — all that saves me from — from *myself*," she added falteringly, and in a hollow voice. "Your love — you know not what it is to me! I scarcely knew it myself before. I feel what it is now, when you say '*part.*'"

Agitated and tortured, Mainwaring writhed at these burning words, bent his face low, and covered it with his hands.

He felt her clasp struggling to withdraw them, yielded, and saw her kneeling at his feet. His manhood, and his gratitude, and his heart, all moved by that sight in one so haughty, he opened his arms, and she fell on his breast. "You will never say 'part' again, William!" she gasped, convulsively.

"But what are we to do?"

"Say, first, what has passed between you and my uncle."

"Little to relate; for I can repeat words, not tones and looks. Sir Miles spoke to me, at first kindly and encouragingly, about my prospects, said it was time that I should fix myself, added a few words with menacing emphasis against what he called "idle dreams and desultory ambition," and observing that I changed countenance — for I felt that I did — his manner became more cold and severe. Lucretia, if he has not detected our secret, he more than suspects my — my presumption. Finally, he said, drily, that I had better return home, consult with my father, and that if I preferred entering into the service of the government to any mercantile profession, he thought he had sufficient interest to promote my views. But, clearly and distinctly, he left on my mind one impression — that my visits here are over."

"Did he allude to me — to Mr. Vernon?"

"Ah, Lucretia! do you know him so little — his delicacy, his pride?"

Lucretia was silent, and Mainwaring continued:

"I felt that I was dismissed; I took my leave of your uncle; I came hither with the intention to say farewell for ever."

"Hush, hush! that thought is over! And you return to your father's; perhaps better so; it is but hope deferred: and, in your absence, I can the more easily allay all suspicion, if suspicion exist; but I must write to you; we must correspond. William, dear William, write often — write kindly; tell me, in

every letter, that you love me — that you love only me — that you will be patient, and confide."

"Dear Lucretia," said Mainwaring, tenderly, and moved by the pathos of her earnest and imploring voice; "but you forget; the bag is always brought first to Sir Miles; he will recognise my hand; and to whom can you trust your own letters?"

"True," replied Lucretia, despondingly; and there was a pause: suddenly she lifted her head, and cried, "but your father's house is not far from this — not ten miles — we can find a spot at the remote end of the park, near the path through the great wood; there I can leave my letters; there I can find yours."

"But it must be seldom. If any of Sir Miles's servants see me, if —"

"Oh, William, William, this is not the language of love!"

"Forgive me — I think of you!"

"Love thinks of nothing but itself; it is tyrannical, absorbing — it forgets even the object loved; it feeds on danger — it strengthens by obstacles," said Lucretia, tossing her hair from her forehead, and with an expression of dark and wild power on her brow and in her eyes: "fear not for me, I am sufficient guard upon myself; even while I speak, I think; yes, I have thought of the very spot. You remember that hollow oak at the bottom of the dell, in which Guy St. John, the cavalier, is said to have hid himself from Fairfax's soldiers. Every Monday I will leave a letter in that hollow; every Tuesday you can search for it, and leave your own. This is but once a-week; there is no risk here."

Mainwaring's conscience still smote him; but he had not the strength to resist the energy of Lucretia. The force of her character seized upon the weak part of his own — its gentleness, its fear of inflicting pain, its reluctance to say "no" — that simple cause of misery to the over timid. A few sentences more, full of courage, confidence, and passion, on the part of the woman, of

constraint, and yet of soothed and grateful affection on that of the man, and the affianced parted.

Mainwaring had already given orders to have his trunks sent to him at his father's; and, a hardy pedestrian by habit, he now struck across the park, passed the dell and the hollow tree, commonly called "Guy's Oak," and across woodland and fields golden with ripening corn, took his way to the town, in the centre of which, square, solid, and imposing, stood the respectable residence of his bustling, active, electioneering father.

Lucretia's eye followed a form, as fair as ever captivated maiden's glance, till it was out of sight; and then, as she emerged from the shade of the cedars into the more open space of the garden, her usual thoughtful composure was restored to her steadfast countenance. On the terrace, she caught sight of Vernon, who had just quitted his own room, where he always breakfasted alone, and who was now languidly stretched on a bench, and basking in the sun. Like all who have abused life, Vernon was not the same man in the early part of the day. The spirits that rose to temperate heat the third hour after noon, and expanded into glow, when the lights shone over gay carousers, at morning were flat and exhausted. With hollow eyes, and that weary fall of the muscles of the cheeks, which betrays the votary of Bacchus, the convivial three-bottle man — Charley Vernon forced a smile, meant to be airy and impertinent to his pale lips as he rose with effort, and extended three fingers to his cousin.

"Where have you been hiding? catching bloom from the roses? — you have the prettiest shade of colour — just enough — not a hue too much. And there is Sir Miles's valet gone to the rectory, and the fat footman puffing away towards the village, and I, like a faithful warden, from my post at the castle, all looking out for the truant."

"But who wants me, cousin?" said Lucretia, with the full blaze of her rare and captivating smile.

"The knight of Laughton confessedly wants thee, O, damsel! — the knight of the Bleeding Heart may want thee more — dare he own it?"

And with a hand that trembled a little, not with love — at least it trembled always a little before the Madeira at luncheon — he lifted hers to his lips.

"Compliments again, words — idle words!" said Lucretia, looking down bashfully.

"How can I convince thee of my sincerity, unless thou takest my life as its pledge, maid of Laughton?"

And very much tired of standing, Charley Vernon drew her gently to the bench, and seated himself by her side. Lucretia's eyes were still downcast, and as she remained silent, Vernon suppressing a yawn, felt that he was bound to continue. There was nothing very formidable in Lucretia's manner.

"Fore Gad!" thought he, "I suppose I must take the heiress after all; the sooner it's over, the sooner I can get back to Brook Street."

"It is premature, my fair cousin," said he, aloud — "premature, after less than a week's visit, and only some fourteen or fifteen hours' permitted friendship and intimacy, to say what is uppermost in my thoughts, but we spendthrifts are slow at nothing, not even at wooing. By sweet Venus, then, fair cousin, you look provokingly handsome! Sir Miles, your good uncle, is pleased to forgive all my follies and faults, upon one condition, that you will take on yourself the easy task to reform me. Will you, my fair cousin? Such as I am, you behold me! I am no sinner in the disguise of a saint! My fortune is spent — my health is not strong; but a young widow's is no mournful position. I am gay when I am well; good tempered when

ailing. I never betrayed a trust — can you trust me with yourself?"

This was a long speech, and Charley Vernon felt pleased that it was over. There was much in its honesty that would have touched a heart even closed to him, and a little genuine emotion had given light to his eyes and colour to his cheek. Amidst all the ravages of dissipation, there was something interesting in his countenance, and manly in his tone and his gesture. But Lucretia was only sensible to one part of his confession — her uncle had consented to his suit. This was all of which she desired to be assured, and against this she now sought to screen herself.

"Your candour, Mr. Vernon," she said, avoiding his eye, "deserves candour in me. I cannot affect to misunderstand you; — but you take me by surprise — I was so unprepared for this. Give me time — I must reflect."

"Reflection is dull work in the country; you can reflect more amusingly in town, my fair cousin."

"I will wait, then, till I find myself in town."

"Ah, you make me the happiest, the most grateful of men," cried Mr. Vernon, rising with a semi-genuflexion, which seemed to imply, "Consider yourself knelt to," just as a courteous assailer, with a motion of the hand, implies, "Consider yourself horsewhipped."

Lucretia, who, with all her intellect, had no capacity for humour, recoiled and looked up in positive surprise.

"I do not understand you, Mr. Vernon," she said, with austere gravity.

"Allow me the bliss of flattering myself that you, at least, are understood," replied Charley Vernon, with imperturbable assurance. "You will wait to reflect till you are in town — that is to say, the day after our honeymoon, when you awake in May Fair."

Before Lucretia could reply, she saw the indefatigable valet formally approaching, with the anticipated message that Sir Miles requested to see her. She replied hurriedly to this last, that she would be with her uncle immediately, and when he had again disappeared within the porch, she said, with a constrained effort at frankness —

"Mr. Vernon, if I have misunderstood your words, I think I do not mistake your character. You cannot wish to take advantage of my affection for my uncle, and the passive obedience I owe to him, to force me into a step — of which — of which — I have not yet sufficiently considered the results. If you really desire that my feelings should be consulted, that I should not — pardon me — consider myself sacrificed to the family pride of my guardian, and the interests of my suitor —"

"Madam!" exclaimed Vernon, reddening.

Pleased with the irritating effect her words had produced — Lucretia continued calmly — "If, in a word, I am to be a free agent in a choice on which my happiness depends, forbear to urge Sir Miles further at present — forbear to press your suit upon me. Give me the delay of a few months; I shall know how to appreciate your delicacy."

"Miss Clavering," answered Vernon, with a touch of the St. John haughtiness, "I am in despair that you should even think so grave an appeal to my honour necessary. I am well aware of your expectations and my poverty. And believe me, I would rather rot in a prison than enrich myself by forcing your inclinations. You have but to say the word, and I will (as becomes me as man and gentleman) screen you from all chance of Sir Miles's displeasure, by taking it on myself to decline an honour of which I feel, indeed, very undeserving."

"But I have offended you," said Lucretia, softly, while she

turned aside to conceal the glad light of her eyes, — "pardon me; and, to prove that you do so, give me your arm to my uncle's room."

Vernon, with rather more of Sir Miles's antiquated stiffness, than his own rakish ease, offered his arm, with a profound reverence, to his cousin; and they took their way to the house. Not till they had passed up the stairs, and were even in the gallery, did further words pass between them. Then Vernon said, "But what is your wish, Miss Clavering? On what footing shall I remain here?"

"Will you suffer me to dictate," replied Lucretia, stopping short with well feigned confusion, as if suddenly aware that the right to dictate gives the right to hope.

"Ah, consider me at least as your slave!" whispered Vernon, as his eye resting on the contour of that matchless neck, partially and advantageously turned from him, he began with his constitutional admiration of the sex, to feel interested in a pursuit, that now seemed, after piquing, to flatter his self-love.

"Then I will use the privilege when we meet again," answered Lucretia; and drawing her arm gently from his, she passed on to her uncle, leaving Vernon midway in the gallery.

Those faded portraits looked down on her with that melancholy gloom, which the effigies of our dead ancestors seem mysteriously to acquire. To noble and aspiring spirits, no homily to truth, and honour, and fair ambition is more eloquent, than the mute and melancholy canvas, from which our fathers made, by death, our household gods, contemplate us still. They appear to confide to us the charge of their unblemished names. They speak to us from the grave, and, heard aright, the pride of family is the guardian angel of its heirs. But Lucretia, with her hard and scholastic mind, despised as the veriest weakness all the poetry

that belongs to the sense of a pure descent. It was because she was proud as the proudest in herself, that she had nothing but contempt for the virtue, the valour, or the wisdom of those that had gone before. So, with a brain busy with guile and stratagem, she trod on, beneath the eyes of the simple and spotless Dead.

Vernon, thus left alone, mused a few moments on what had passed between himself and the heiress, and then slowly retracing his steps, his eye roved along the stately series of his line. "Faith!" he muttered, "if my boyhood had been passed in this old gallery, his Royal Highness would have lost a good fellow and hard drinker; and his Majesty would have had, perhaps, a more distinguished soldier — certainly, a worthier subject. If I marry this lady, and we are blessed with a son, he shall walk through this gallery, once a-day, before he is flogged into Latin!"

Lucretia's interview with her uncle was a masterpiece of art. What pity that such craft and subtlety were wasted in our little day, and on such petty objects; under the Medici, that spirit had gone far to the shaping of history. Sure, from her uncle's openness, that he would plunge at once into the subject for which she deemed she was summoned, she evinced no repugnance, when, tenderly kissing her, he asked, "If Charles Vernon had a chance of winning favour in her eyes?" She knew that she was safe in saying "No:" that her uncle would never force her inclinations. Safe so far as Vernon was concerned; but she desired more; she desired thoroughly to quench all suspicion that her heart was pre-occupied; entirely to remove from Sir Miles's thoughts the image of Mainwaring; and a denial of one suitor might quicken the baronet's eyes to the concealment of the other. Nor was this all: if Sir Miles desired to see her settled in marriage before his death, the dismissal of Vernon might only expose her to the importunity of new candidates, more difficult

to deal with. Vernon himself she could use as the shield against the arrows of a host. Therefore, when Sir Miles repeated his question, she answered with much gentleness and seeming modest sense: that 'Mr. Vernon had much that must prepossess in his favour; that in addition to his own advantages he had one, the highest in her eyes, her uncle's sanction and approval. But,' and she hesitated with becoming and natural diffidence, 'were not his habits unfixed and roving? So it was said; she knew not herself — she would trust her happiness to her uncle. But if so, and if Mr. Vernon were really disposed to change, would it not be prudent to try him — try him where there was temptation; not in the repose of Laughton, but amidst his own haunts of London? Sir Miles had friends who would honestly inform him of the result. She did but suggest this: she was too ready to leave all to her dear guardian's acuteness and experience.'

Melted by her docility, and in high approval of the prudence which betokened a more rational judgment than he himself had evinced, the good old man clasped her to his breast, and shed tears as he praised and thanked her — she had decided as she always did for the best—Heaven forbid that she should be wasted on an incorrigible man of pleasure! "And," said the frank-hearted gentleman, unable long to keep any thought concealed, "And to think that I could have wronged you, for a moment, my own noble child!—that I could have been dolt enough to suppose that the good looks of that boy Mainwaring might have caused you to forget what — but you change colour!" — for with all her dissimulation, Lucretia loved too ardently not to shrink at that name thus suddenly pronounced. "Oh," continued the baronet, drawing her towards him still more closely, while with one hand he put back her face that he might read its expression the more closely — "oh, if it had been so — if it be so, I will pity, not blame you, for my neglect was the fault; pity you, for I have

known a similar struggle; admire you in pity, for you have the spirit of your ancestors, and you will conquer the weakness. Speak! have I touched on the truth. Speak without fear, child!—you have no mother; but in age a man sometimes gets a mother's heart."

Startled and alarmed as the lark when the step nears its nest, Lucretia summoned all the dark wile of her nature to mislead the intruder. "No, uncle, no; I am not so unworthy. You misconceived my emotion."

"Ah, you know that he has had the presumption to love you—the puppy! and you feel the compassion you women always feel for such offenders? Is that it?"

Rapidly Lucretia considered if it would be wise to leave that impression on his mind; on one hand, it might account for a moment's agitation, and if Mainwaring were detected hovering near the domain, in the exchange of their correspondence, it might appear but the idle, if hopeless, romance of youth, which haunts the mere home of its object — but, no; on the other hand, it left his banishment absolute and confirmed. Her resolution was taken with a promptitude that made her pause not perceptible.

"No, my dear uncle," she said so cheerfully, that it removed all doubt from the mind of her listener, "but Monsieur Dalibard has rallied me on the subject, and I was so angry with him, that when you touched on it I thought more of my quarrel with him than of poor timid Mr. Mainwaring himself. Come now, own it, dear Sir! Monsieur Dalibard has instilled this strange fancy into your head."

"No, 'Slife: if he had taken such a liberty, I should have lost my librarian. No, I assure you, it was rather Vernon: you know true love is jealous."

"Vernon!" thought Lucretia; "he must go, and at once." Sliding from her uncle's arms to the stool at his feet, she then

led the conversation more familiarly back into the channel it had lost, and when at last she escaped, it was with the understanding that, without promise or compromise, Mr. Vernon should return to London at once, and be put upon the ordeal, through which she felt assured it was little likely he should pass with success.

CHAPTER IV.

GUY'S OAK.

THREE weeks afterwards, the life at Laughton seemed restored to the cheerful and somewhat monotonous tranquillity of its course, before chafed and disturbed by the recent interruptions to the stream. Vernon had departed satisfied with the justice of the trial imposed on him, and far too high spirited to seek to extort from niece or uncle any engagement beyond that which, to a nice sense of honour, the trial itself imposed. His memory and his heart were still faithful to Mary; but his senses, his fancy, his vanity, were a little involved in his success with the heiress. Though so free from all mercenary meanness, Mr. Vernon was still enough man of the world to be sensible of the advantages of the alliance which had first been pressed on him by Sir Miles; and from which Lucretia herself appeared not to be averse. The season of London was over, but there was always a set, and that set the one in which Charley Vernon principally moved, who found town fuller than the country. Besides, he went occasionally to Brighton, which was then to England what Baiæ was to Rome. The Prince was holding gay court at the Pavilion, and that was the atmosphere which Vernon was habituated to breathe. He was no parasite of royalty: he had that strong personal affection to the Prince which it is often the good fortune of royalty to attract. Nothing is less founded than the complaint which poets put into the lips of princes, that they have no friends; it is, at least, their own perverse fault if that be the case — a little amiability, a little of frank kindness goes so far when it emanates from the rays of a crown! But Vernon was

stronger than Lucretia deemed him, — once contemplating the prospect of a union which was to consign to his charge the happiness of another, and feeling all that he should owe in such a marriage to the confidence both of niece and uncle, he evinced steadier principles than he had ever made manifest, when he had only his own fortune to mar, and his own happiness to trifle with. He joined his old companions; but he kept aloof from their more dissipated pursuits. Beyond what was then thought the venial error of too devout libations to Bacchus, Charley Vernon seemed reformed.

Ardworth had joined a regiment which had departed for the field of action. Mainwaring was still with his father, and had not yet announced to Sir Miles any wish or project for the future.

Olivier Dalibard, as before, passed his mornings alone in his chamber — his noon and his evenings with Sir Miles. He avoided all private conferences with Lucretia. She did not provoke them. Young Gabriel amused himself as before, in copying Sir Miles's pictures, sketching from Nature, scribbling in his room, prose or verse, no matter which, (he never showed his lucubrations,) pinching the dogs when he could catch them alone, shooting the cats, if they appeared in the plantation, on pretence of love for the young pheasants, sauntering into the cottages, where he was a favourite, because of his good looks, but where he always contrived to leave the trace of his visits in disorder and mischief, upsetting the tea-kettle and scalding the children, or, what he loved dearly, setting two gossips by the ears. But these occupations were over by the hour Lucretia left her apartment. From that time he never left her out of view; and, when encouraged to join her at his usual privileged times, whether in the gardens at sunset, or in her evening niche in the drawing-room, he was sleek, silken, and caressing as Cupid, after plaguing the Nymphs, at the feet of Psyche. These two

strange persons had indeed apparently that sort of sentimental familiarity which is sometimes seen between a fair boy and a girl much older than himself; but the attraction that drew them together was an indefinable instinct of their similarity in many traits of their several characters, — the whelp leopard sported fearlessly round the she-panther. Before Olivier's midnight conference with his son, Gabriel had drawn close and closer to Lucretia, as an ally against his father; for that father he cherished feelings which, beneath the most docile obedience, concealed horror and hate, and something of the ferocity of revenge. And if young Varney loved any one on earth except himself it was Lucretia Clavering. She had administered to his ruling passions, which were for effect and display; she had devised the dress which set off to the utmost his exterior, and gave it that picturesque and artistic appearance, which he had sighed for in his study of the portraits of Titian and Vandyke. She supplied him (for in money she was generous) with enough to gratify and forestall every boyish caprice, and this liberality now turned against her, for it had increased into a settled vice, his natural taste for extravagance, and made all other considerations subordinate to that of feeding his cupidity. She praised his drawings, which, though self-taught, were indeed extraordinary, predicted his fame as an artist, lifted him into consequence amongst the guests by her notice and eulogies; and what, perhaps, won him more than all, he felt that it was to her — to Dalibard's desire to conceal before her his more cruel propensities — that he owed his father's change from the most refined severity to the most paternal gentleness.

And thus he had repaid her, as she expected, by a devotion which she trusted to employ against her tutor himself, should the baffled aspirant become the scheming rival and the secret foe. But now, thoroughly aware of the gravity of his father's objects, seeing before him the chance of a settled establishment at Laugh-

ton, a positive and influential connexion with Lucretia; and on the other hand, a return to the poverty he recalled with disgust, and the terrors of his father's solitary malice and revenge, he entered fully into Dalibard's sombre plans, and, without scruple or remorse, would have abetted any harm to his benefactress. Thus craft doomed to have accomplices in craft, resembles the spider whose web, spread indeed for the fly, attracts the spider that shall thrust it forth, and profit by the meshes it has woven for a victim, to surrender to a master.

Already young Varney, set quietly and ceaselessly to spy every movement of Lucretia's, had reported to his father two visits to the most retired part of the park — two visits chancing the same day of the week; but he had not yet ventured near enough to discover the exact spot, and his very watch on Lucretia had prevented the detection of Mainwaring himself in his stealthy exchange of correspondence. Dalibard bade him continue his watch, without hinting at his ulterior intentions, for indeed, in these he was not decided. Even should he discover any communication between Lucretia and Mainwaring, how reveal it to Sir Miles without for ever precluding himself from the chance of profiting by the betrayal? Could Lucretia ever forgive the injury, and could she fail to detect the hand that inflicted it? His only hope was in the removal of Mainwaring from his path by other agencies than his own, and (by an appearance of generosity and self-abandonment; in keeping her secret, and submitting to his fate) he trusted to regain the confidence she now withheld from him, and use it to his advantage when the time came to defend himself from Vernon. For he had learned from Sir Miles the passive understanding with respect to that candidate for her hand; and he felt assured that had Mainwaring never existed, could he cease to exist for her hopes, Lucretia, despite her dissimulation, would succumb to one she feared but respected, rather than to one she evidently trifled with and despised.

'But the course to be taken must be adopted after the evidence is collected,' thought the subtle schemer, and he tranquilly continued his chess with the baronet.

Before, however, Gabriel could make any further discoveries, an event occurred which excited very different emotions amongst those it more immediately interested.

Sir Miles had, during the last twelvemonths, been visited by two seizures, seemingly of an apoplectic character. Whether they were apoplexy or, the less alarming attacks that arise from some more gentle congestion, occasioned by free living and indolent habits, was matter of doubt with his physician — not a very skilful, though a very formal man. Country doctors were not then the same able, educated, and scientific class that they are now rapidly becoming. Sir Miles himself so stoutly and so eagerly repudiated the least hint of the more unfavourable interpretation, that the doctor, if not convinced by his patient, was awed from expressing plainly a contrary opinion. There are certain persons who will dismiss their physician if he tells them the truth: Sir Miles was one of them.

In his character there was a weakness not uncommon to the proud. He did not fear death, but he shrank from the thought that others should calculate on his dying. He was fond of his power, though he exercised it gently; he knew that the power of wealth and station is enfeebled in proportion as its dependents can foresee the date of its transfer. He dreaded, too, the comments which are always made on those visited by his peculiar disease: "Poor Sir Miles! an apoplectic fit! his intellect must be very much shaken — he revoked at whist last night — memory sadly impaired!" This may be a pitiable foible; but heroes and statesmen have had it most: pardon it in the proud old man. He enjoined the physician to state throughout the house and the neighbourhood, that the attacks were wholly innocent and unimportant. The physician did so, and was generally believed;

for Sir Miles seemed as lively and as vigorous after them as before. Two persons alone were not deceived — Dalibard and Lucretia. The first, at an earlier part of his life, had studied the art of medicine with the profound patience and ingenious application, which he brought to bear up on all he undertook. He whispered from the first to Lucretia —

"Unless your uncle changes his habits, takes exercise, and forbears wine and the table, his days are numbered."

And when this intelligence was first conveyed to her, before she had become acquainted with Mainwaring, Lucretia felt the shock of a grief sudden and sincere. We have seen how these better sentiments changed as a human life became an obstacle in her way. In her character, what phrenologists call 'destructiveness,' in the comprehensive sense of the word, was superlatively developed. She had not cruelty; she was not blood-thirsty: those vices belong to a different cast of character. She was rather deliberately and intellectually unsparing — a goal was before her; she must march to it; all in the way were but hostile impediments. At first, however, Sir Miles was not in the way, except to fortune, and for that, as avarice was not her leading vice, she could well wait; therefore, at this hint of the Provençal's, she ventured to urge her uncle to abstinence and exercise, but Sir Miles was touchy on the subject; he feared the interpretations which great change of habits might suggest, the memory of the fearful warning died away, and he felt as well as before, for, save an old rheumatic gout (which had long since left him, with no other apparent evil but a lameness in the joints, that rendered exercise unwelcome and painful), he possessed one of those comfortable, and often treacherous constitutions, which evincé no displeasure at irregularities, and bear all liberties with philosophical composure. Accordingly, he would have his own way; and he contrived to coax or to force his doctor into an authority on his side: wine was necessary to

his constitution; much exercise was a dangerous fatigue. The second attack, following four months after the first, was less alarming, and Sir Miles fancied it concealed even from his niece; but three nights after his recovery, the old baronet sat musing alone for some time in his own room, before he retired to rest. Then he rose, opened his desk, and read his will attentively, locked it up with a slight sigh, and took down his Bible. The next morning he despatched the letters which summoned Ardworth and Vernon to his house; and, as he quitted his room, his look lingered with melancholy fondness upon the portraits in the gallery. No one was by the old man to interpret these slight signs, in which lay a world of meaning.

A few weeks after Vernon had left the house, and in the midst of the restored tranquillity we have described, it so happened that Sir Miles's physician, after dining at the hall, had been summoned to attend one of the children at the neighbouring rectory, and there he spent the night. A little before daybreak his slumbers were disturbed; he was recalled in all haste to Laughton Hall. For the third time, he found Sir Miles speechless. Dalibard was by his bedside. Lucretia had not been made aware of the seizure; for Sir Miles had previously told his valet (who of late slept in the same room) never to alarm Miss Clavering if he was taken ill. The doctor was about to apply his usual remedies; but when he drew forth his lancet, Dalibard placed his hand on the physician's arm —

"Not *this* time," he said, slowly, and with emphasis; "it will be his death."

"Pooh, Sir!" said the doctor, disdainfully.

"Do so, then! bleed him, and take the responsibility. I have studied medicine — I know these symptoms. In this case the apoplexy may spare — the lancet kills."

The physician drew back dismayed and doubtful.

"What would you do, then?"

"Wait three minutes longer the effect of the cataplasms I have applied. If they fail —"

"Ay, then?"

"A chill bath, and vigorous friction."

"Sir, I will never permit it."

"Then murder your patient your own way."

All this while Sir Miles lay senseless, his eyes wide open, his teeth locked. The doctor drew near, looked at the lancet, and said irresolutely —

"Your practice is new to me; but if you have studied medicine, that 's another matter. Will you guarantee the success of your plan?"

"Yes."

"Mind, I wash my hands of it; I take Mr. Jones to witness:" and he appealed to the valet.

"Call up the footmen, and lift your master," said Dalibard; and the doctor, glancing round, saw that a bath, filled some seven or eight inches deep with water, stood already prepared in the room. Perplexed and irresolute, he offered no obstacle to Dalibard's movements. The body, seemingly lifeless, was placed in the bath; and the servants, under Dalibard's directions, applied vigorous and incessant friction. Several minutes elapsed before any favourable symptom took place; at length, Sir Miles heaved a deep sigh, and the eyes moved — a minute or two more, and the teeth chattered; the blood, set in motion, appeared on the surface of the skin: life ebbed back; the danger was past; the dark foe driven from the citadel. Sir Miles spoke audibly, though incoherently, as he was taken back to his bed, warmly covered up, the lights removed, noise forbidden, and Dalibard and the doctor remained in silence by the bedside.

'Rich man,' thought Dalibard, 'thine hour is not yet come; thy wealth must not pass to the boy Mainwaring.'

Sir Miles's recovery, under the care of Dalibard, who now had his own way, was as rapid and complete as before. Lucretia, when she heard, the next morning, of the attack, felt, we dare not say, a guilty joy, but a terrible and feverish agitation. Sir Miles himself, informed by his valet, of Dalibard's wrestle with the doctor, felt a profound gratitude, and reverent wonder for the simple means to which he probably owed his restoration; and he listened with a docility which Dalibard was not prepared to expect, to his learned secretary's urgent admonitions, as to the life he must lead, if he desired to live at all. Convinced, at last, that wine and good cheer had not blockaded out the enemy, and having to do, in Olivier Dalibard, with a very different temper from the doctor's, he assented with a tolerable grace to the trial of a strict regimen and to daily exercise in the open air. Dalibard now became constantly with him — the increase of his influence was as natural as it was apparent. Lucretia trembled; she divined a danger in his power, now separate from her own, and which threatened to be independent of it. She became abstracted and uneasy — jealousy of the Provençal possessed her. She began to meditate schemes to his downfall. At this time, Sir Miles received the following letter from Mr. Fielden: —

"Southampton, August 20th, 1801.

"Dear Sir Miles, — You will remember that I informed you when I arrived at Southampton, with my dear young charge; and Susan has twice written to her sister, implying the request which she lacked the courage, seeing that she is timid, expressly to urge, that Miss Clavering might again be permitted to visit her. Miss Clavering has answered, as might be expected from the propinquity of the relationship; but she has perhaps the same fears of offending you that actuate her sister. But now, since the worthy clergyman, who had undertaken my parochial duties, has

found the air insalubrious, and prays me not to enforce the engagement by which we had exchanged our several charges for the space of a calendar year, I am reluctantly compelled to return home — my dear wife, thank Heaven, being already restored to health, which is an unspeakable mercy; and I am sure I cannot be sufficiently grateful to Providence, which has not only provided me with a liberal independence of more than two hundred pounds a-year, but the best of wives and the most dutiful of children — possessions that I venture to call 'the riches of the heart.' Now, I pray you, my dear Sir Miles, to gratify these two deserving young persons, and to suffer Miss Lucretia incontinently to visit her sister. Counting on your consent, thus boldly demanded, I have already prepared an apartment for Miss Clavering; and Susan is busy in what, though I do not know much of such feminine matters, the whole house declares to be a most beautiful and fanciful toilet cover, with roses and forget-me-nots cut out of muslin, and two large silk tassels, which cost her three shillings and fourpence. I cannot conclude, without thanking you from my heart for your noble kindness to young Ardworth. He is so full of ardour and spirit, that I remember, poor lad, when I left him, as I thought, hard at work on that well-known problem of Euclid, vulgarly called the Asses' Bridge — I found him describing a figure of 8 on the village pond, which was only just frozen over! Poor lad! Heaven will take care of him, I know, as it does of all who take no care of themselves. Ah, Sir Miles, if you could but see Susan — such a nurse, too, in illness!

"I have the honour to be,

"Sir Miles,

"Your most humble, poor servant to command,

"MATTHEW FIELDEN."

Sir Miles put this letter in his niece's hand, and said, kindly, "Why not have gone to see your sister before? — I should not have been angry. Go, my child, as soon as you like: to-morrow is Sunday — no travelling that day — but the next, the carriage shall be at your order."

Lucretia hesitated a moment. To leave Dalibard in sole possession of the field, even for a few days, was a thought of alarm; but what evil could he do in that time? And her pulse beat quickly! — Mainwaring could come to Southampton! — she should see him again, after more than six weeks' absence! She had so much to relate and to hear — she fancied his last letter had been colder and shorter — she yearned to hear him say with his own lips, that "he loved her still!" This idea banished or prevailed over all others. She thanked her uncle cheerfully and gaily, and the journey was settled.

"Be at watch early on Monday," said Olivier, to his son.

Monday came — the baronet had ordered the carriage to be at the door at ten. A little before eight, Lucretia stole out, and took her way to Guy's Oak. Gabriel had placed himself in readiness; he had climbed a tree at the bottom of the park (near the place where hitherto he had lost sight of her); she passed under it, — on through a dark grove of pollard oaks. When she was at a sufficient distance, the boy dropped from his perch; with the stealth of an Indian, he crept on her trace, following from tree to tree, always sheltered, always watchful; he saw her pause at the dell, and look round — she descended into the hollow; he slunk through the fern — he gained the marge of the dell, and looked down — she was lost to his sight. At length, to his surprise, he saw the gleam of her robe emerge from the hollow of a tree — her head stooped as she came through the aperture; he had time to

shrink back amongst the fern; she passed on hurriedly, the same way she had taken, back to the house; then into the dell crept the boy. Guy's Oak, vast and venerable, with gnarled green boughs below, and sere branches above, that told that its day of fall was doomed at last — rose high from the abyss of the hollow — high and far seen amidst the trees that stood on the vantage-ground above — even as a great name soars the loftier when it springs from the grave. A dark and irregular fissure gave entrance to the heart of the oak — the boy glided in and looked round — he saw nothing — yet something there must be. The rays of the early sun did not penetrate into the hollow, it was as dim as a cave. He felt slowly in every crevice, and a startled moth or two flew out. It was not for moths that the girl had come to Guy's Oak! He drew back, at last, in despair; as he did so, he heard a low sound close at hand, a low murmuring, angry sound, like a hiss; he looked back, and through the dark, two burning eyes fixed his own — he had startled a snake from its bed. He drew out in time, as the reptile sprang; but now his task, search, and object, were forgotten. With the versatility of a child, his thoughts were all on the enemy he had provoked. That zest of prey which is inherent in man's breast, which makes him love the sport and the chase, and maddens boyhood and age with the passion for slaughter, leapt up within him; anything of danger, and contest, and excitement, gave Gabriel Varney a strange fever of pleasure. He sprang up the sides of the dell, climbed the park pales on which it bordered, was in the wood where the young shoots rose green and strong from the underwood; — to cut a staff for the strife, to descend again into the dell, creep again through the fissure, look round for those vengeful eyes, was quick done as the joyous play of the impulse. The poor snake had slid down in content and fancied security; its young, perhaps, were not far off; its wrath had been the instinct Nature gives to the mother. It hath done thee no harm yet, boy; leave it in peace! The young

hunter had no ear to such whisper of prudence or mercy. Dim and blind in the fissure, he struck the ground and the tree with his stick, shouted out, bade the eyes gleam, and defied them; whether or not the reptile had spent its ire in the first fruitless spring, and this unlookedfor return of the intruder rather daunted than exasperated, we leave those better versed in natural history to conjecture; but, instead of obeying the challenge and courting the contest, it glided by the sides of the oak, close to the very feet of its foe, and, emerging into the light, dragged its gray coils through the grass; but its hiss still betrayed it. Gabriel sprang through the fissure, and struck at the craven, insulting it with a laugh of scorn as he struck. Suddenly it halted, suddenly reared its crest; the throat swelled with venom, the tongue darted out, and again, green as emeralds, glared the spite of its eyes. No fear felt Gabriel Varney; his arm was averted; he gazed spelled and admiringly with the eye of an artist. Had he had pencil and tablet at that moment, he would have dropped his weapon for the sketch, though the snake had been as deadly as the viper of Sumatra. The sight sunk into his memory, to be reproduced often by the wild, morbid fancies of his hand. Scarce a moment, however, had he for the gaze; the reptile sprang, and fell, baffled and bruised by the involuntary blow of its enemy. As it writhed on the grass, how its colours came out — how graceful were the movements of its pain! And still the boy gazed, till the eye was sated, and the cruelty returned. A blow — a second — a third — all the beauty is gone — shapeless, and clotted with gore, that elegant head; mangled and dissevered the airy spires of that delicate shape, which had glanced in its circling involutions, free and winding as a poet's thought through his verse. The boy trampled the quivering relics into the sod, with a fierce animal joy of conquest, and turned once more towards the hollow, for a last almost hopeless survey. Lo, his object was found! In his search for the snake, either his staff, or his foot, had disturbed

a layer of moss in the corner; the faint ray, ere he entered the hollow, gleamed upon something white. He emerged from the cavity with a letter in his hand: he read the address, thrust it into his bosom, and as stealthily, but more rapidly, than he had come, took his way to his father.

CHAPTER V.

HOUSEHOLD TREASON.

THE Provençal took the letter from his son's hand, and looked at him with an approbation half-complacent, half-ironical. "*Mon fils!*" said he, patting the boy's head gently; "why should we not be friends? We want each other; we have the strong world to fight against."

"Not if you are master of this place."

"Well answered: no; then we shall have the strong world on our side, and shall have only rogues and the poor to make war upon." Then, with a quiet gesture, he dismissed his son, and gazed slowly on the letter. His pulse, which was usually low, quickened, and his lips were tightly compressed; he shrank from the contents with a jealous pang; as a light quivers strugglingly in a noxious vault, love, descended into that hideous breast, gleamed upon dreary horrors, and warred with the noxious atmosphere; but it shone still. To this dangerous man, every art that gives power to the household traitor was familiar; he had no fear that the violated seal should betray the fraud which gave the contents to the eye that, at length, steadily fell upon the following lines:

"Dearest, and ever dearest, —

"Where art thou at this moment? what are thy thoughts? are they upon me? I write this at the dead of night. I picture you to myself as my hand glides over the paper. I think I see you, as you look on these words, and envy them the gaze of

those dark eyes. Press your lips to the paper. Do you feel the kiss that I leave there? Well, well! it will not be for long now that we shall be divided. Oh, what joy, when I think that I am about to see you. Two days more, at most three, and we shall meet — shall we not? I am going to see my sister. I subjoin my address. Come, come, come; I thirst to see you once more. And I did well to say, 'Wait, and be patient;' we shall not wait long: before the year is out, I shall be free. My uncle has had another and more deadly attack. I see its trace in his face, in his step, in his whole form and bearing. The only obstacle between us is fading away. Can I grieve when I think it? — grieve when life with you spreads smiling beyond the old man's grave? And why should age, that has survived all passion, stand with its chilling frown, and the miserable prejudices the world has not conquered, but strengthened into a creed — why should age stand between youth and youth? I feel your mild eyes rebuke me as I write. But chide me not that on earth I see only you: And it will be mine to give you wealth and rank! — mine to see the homage of my own heart reflected from the crowd who bow not to the statue, but the pedestal. Oh, how I shall enjoy your revenge upon the proud! — for I have drawn no pastoral scenes in my picture of the future. No; I see you leading senates, and duping fools. I shall be by your side, your partner, step after step, as you mount the height, for I am ambitious, you know, William; and not less, because I love: Rather ten thousand times more so. I would not have you born great and noble, for what then could we look to? what use all my schemes, and my plans, and aspirings? Fortune, accident would have taken from us the great zest of life, which is desire.

"When I see you, I shall tell you that I have some fears of Olivier Dalibard: he has evidently some wily project in view. He, who never interfered before with the blundering physician, now thrusts him aside, affects to have saved the old man, at-

tends him always. Dares he think to win an influence, to turn against me? — against us? Happily, when I shall come back, my uncle will probably be restored to the false strength which deceives him; he will have less need of Dalibard, and then — then let the Frenchman beware! I have already a plot to turn his schemes to his own banishment. Come to Southampton, then, as soon as you can — perhaps the day you receive this — on Wednesday, at farthest. Your last letter implies blame of my policy with respect to Vernon. Again I say, it is necessary to amuse my uncle to the last. Before Vernon can advance a claim, there will be weeping at Laughton. I shall weep, too, perhaps; but there will be joy in those tears, as well as sorrow: for then, when I clasp thy hand, I can murmur, 'It is mine at last, and for ever!'

"Adieu! no, not adieu — to our meeting, my lover, my beloved! — thy LUCRETIA!"

An hour after Miss Clavering had departed on her visit, Dalibard returned the letter to his son, the seal seemingly unbroken, and bade him replace it in the hollow of the tree, but sufficiently in sight, to betray itself to the first that entered. He then communicated the plan he had formed for its detection — a plan which would prevent Lucretia ever suspecting the agency of his son or himself; and this done, he joined Sir Miles in the gallery. Hitherto, in addition to his other apprehensions in revealing to the baronet Lucretia's clandestine intimacy with Mainwaring, Dalibard had shrunk from the thought, that the disclosure would lose her the heritage which had first tempted his avarice or ambition; but now his jealous and his vindictive passions were aroused, and his whole plan of strategy was changed. He must crush Lucretia, or she would crush him, as her threats declared. To ruin her in Sir Miles's eyes, to expel her from his house, might not, after all, weaken his own position, even

with regard to power over herself. If he remained firmly established at Laughton, he could affect intercession, he could delay at least any precipitate union with Mainwaring, by practising on the ambition which he still saw at work beneath her love; he might become a necessary ally, and then, — why then — his ironical smile glanced across his lips. But beyond this his quick eye saw fair prospects to self-interest — Lucretia banished; the heritage not hers; the will to be altered; Dalibard esteemed indispensable to the life of the baronet! Come, there was hope here, not for the heritage, indeed, but at least for a munificent bequest.

At noon, some visiters, bringing strangers from London, whom Sir Miles had invited to see the house, (which was one of the lions of the neighbourhood, though not professedly a show place,) were expected. Aware of this, Dalibard prayed the baronet to rest quiet till his company arrived, and then he said, carelessly —

"It will be a healthful diversion to your spirits to accompany them a little in the park — you can go in your garden chair — you will have new companions to talk with by the way; and it is always warm and sunny at the slope of the hill, towards the bottom of the park."

Sir Miles assented cheerfully: the guests came; strolled over the house, admired the pictures and the armour, and the hall and the staircase; paid due respect to the substantial old-fashioned luncheon; and then, refreshed, and in great good humour, acquiesced in Sir Miles's proposition to saunter through the park.

The poor baronet was more lively than usual. The younger people clustered gaily round his chair (which was wheeled by his valet), smiling at his jests, and charmed with his courteous high breeding. A little in the rear, walked Gabriel, paying special attention to the prettiest and merriest girl of the com-

pany, who was a great favourite with Sir Miles, perhaps for those reasons.

"What a delightful old gentleman!" said the young lady. "How I envy Miss Clavering such an uncle!"

"Ah! but you are a little out of favour to-day, I can tell you," said Gabriel, laughingly; "you were close by Sir Miles when he went through the picture-gallery, and you never asked him the history of the old knight in the buff doublet and blue sash."

"Dear me, what of that?"

"Why, that was brave Colonel Guy St. John, the cavalier; the pride and boast of Sir Miles: you know his weakness. He looked so displeased when you said, 'what a droll looking figure!' I was on thorns for you!"

"What a pity! I would not offend dear Sir Miles for the world."

"Well, it 's easy to make it up with him. Go, and tell him that he must take you to see Guy's Oak, in the dell, that you have heard so much about it; and when you get him on his hobby, it is hard if you can't make your peace."

"Oh! I 'll certainly do it, Master Varney;" and the young lady lost no time in obeying the hint. Gabriel had set other tongues on the same cry, so that there was a general exclamation, when the girl named the subject — "Oh, Guy's Oak, by all means!"

Much pleased with the enthusiasm this memorial of his pet ancestor produced, Sir Miles led the way to the dell, and, pausing as he reached the verge, said —

"I fear I cannot do you the honours: it is too steep for my chair to descend safely."

Gabriel whispered the fair companion whose side he still kept to.

"Now, my dear Sir Miles," cried the girl, "I positively won't stir without you; I am sure we could get down the chair without a jolt. Look there, how nicely the ground slopes! Jane, Lucy, my dears, let us take charge of Sir Miles. Now, then."

The gallant old gentleman would have marched to the breach in such guidance: he kissed the fair hands that lay so temptingly on his chair, and then rising with some difficulty, said —

"No, my dears, you have made me so young again, that I think I can walk down the steep with the best of you."

So, leaning partly on his valet, and by the help of the hands extended to him, step after step, Sir Miles, with well-disguised effort, reached the huge roots of the oak.

"The hollow then was much smaller," said he, "so he was not so easily detected as a man would be now: the damned crop-ears — I beg pardon, my dears — the rascally rebels, poked their swords through the fissure, and two went, one through his jerkin, one through his arm; but he took care not to swear at the liberty, and they went away, not suspecting him."

While thus speaking, the young people were already playfully struggling which should first enter the oak. Two got precedence, and went in and out, one after the other. Gabriel breathed hard — "The blind owlets!" thought he, "and I put the letter where a mole would have seen it!"

"You know the spell when you enter an oak tree where the fairies have been," he whispered to the fair object of his notice. "You must turn round three times, look carefully on the ground, and you will see the face you love best. If I was but a little older, how I should pray! —"

"Nonsense!" said the girl, blushing, as she now slid through the crowd, and went timidly in; presently she uttered a little exclamation.

The gallant Sir Miles stooped down to see what was the matter, and offering his hand as she came out, was startled to see her holding a letter.

"Only think what I have found!" said the girl. "What a strange place for a post-office! Bless me! it is directed to Mr. Mainwaring!"

"Mr. Mainwaring!" cried three or four voices; but the baronet's was mute. His eye recognised Lucretia's hand; his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; the blood surged, like a sea, in his temples; his face became purple. Suddenly Gabriel, peeping over the girl's shoulder, snatched away the letter.

"It is my letter — it is mine! What a shame in Mainwaring not to have come for it as he promised!"

Sir Miles looked round, and breathed more freely.

"Yours, Master Varney!" said the young lady, astonished. "What can make your letters to Mr. Mainwaring such a secret?"

"Oh! you 'll laugh at me; but — but — I wrote a poem on Guy's Oak, and Mr. Mainwaring promised to get it into the County Paper for me; and as he was to pass close by the park pales, through the wood yonder, on his way to D — last Saturday, we agreed that I should leave it here; but he has forgotten his promise, I see."

Sir Miles grasped the boy's arm with a convulsive pressure of gratitude. There was a general cry for Gabriel to read his poem on the spot; but the boy looked sheepish, and hung down his head, and seemed rather more disposed to cry than to recite. Sir Miles, with an effort at simulation that all his long practice of the world never could have nerved him to, unexcited by a motive less strong than the honour of his blood and house, came to the relief of the young wit that had just come to his own.

"Nay," he said, almost calmly, "I know our young poet is too shy to oblige you. I will take charge of your verses, Master Gabriel;" and, with a grave air of command, he took the letter from the boy, and placed it in his pocket.

The return to the house was less gay than the visit to the oak. The baronet himself made a feverish effort to appear blithe and *débonnair* as before; but it was not successful. Fortunately, the carriages were all at the door as they reached the house, and, luncheon being over, nothing delayed the parting compliments of the guests. As the last carriage drove away, Sir Miles beckoned to Gabriel, and bade him follow him into his room.

When there, he dismissed his valet, and said —

"You know, then, who wrote this letter. Have you been in the secret of the correspondence? Speak the truth, my dear boy, it shall cost you nothing."

"Oh, Sir Miles!" cried Gabriel, earnestly, "I know nothing whatever beyond this — that I saw the hand of my dear kind Miss Lucretia; that I felt, I hardly knew why, that both you and she would not have those people discover it, which they would if the letter had been circulated from one to the other, for some one would have known the hand as well as myself, and therefore I spoke, without thinking, the first thing that came into my head."

"You — you have obliged me and my niece, Sir," said the baronet, tremulously; and then with a forced and sickly smile, he added — "some foolish vagary of Lucretia's, I suppose; I must scold her for it. Say nothing about it, however, to any one."

"Oh no, Sir!"

"Good-by, my dear Gabriel!"

"And that boy saved the honour of my niece's name — my mother's grandchild! Oh, God! this is bitter! — in my old age, too!"

He bowed his head over his hands, and tears forced them-

selves through his fingers. He was long before he had courage to read the letter, though he little foreboded all the shock that it would give him. It was the first letter, not destined to himself, of which he had ever broken the seal. Even that recollection made the honourable old man pause; but his duty was plain and evident, as head of the house, and guardian to his niece. Thrice he wiped his spectacles; still they were dim, still the tears would come. He rose tremblingly, walked to the window, and saw the stately deer grouped in the distance, saw the church spire, that rose above the burial-vault of his ancestors, and his heart sunk deeper and deeper, as he muttered — "Vain pride! pride!" Then he crept to the door, and locked it, and at last, seating himself firmly, as a wounded man to some terrible operation, he read the letter.

Heaven support thee, old man! thou hast to pass through the bitterest trial which honour and affection can undergo;—household treason! When the wife lifts high the blushless front, and brazens out her guilt; when the child, with loud voice, throws off all control, and makes boast of disobedience, man revolts at the audacity; his spirit arms against his wrong; its face, at least, is bare; the blow, if sacrilegious, is direct. But, when mild words and soft kisses conceal the worst foe Fate can arm — when amidst the confidence of the heart starts up the form of Perfidy — when out from the reptile swells the fiend in its terror — when the breast on which man leaned for comfort, has taken counsel to deceive him—when he learns, that day after day, the life entwined with his own has been a lie and a stage-mime, he feels not the softness of grief, nor the absorption of rage; it is mightier than grief, and more withering than rage; it is a horror that appals. The heart does not bleed; the tears do not flow, as in woes to which humanity is commonly subjected; it is as if something out of the course of nature had taken place; something monstrous and out of all thought and forewarning; for the domestic traitor is a being apart

from the orbit of criminals; the felon has no fear of his innocent children; with a price on his head, he lays it in safety on the bosom of his wife. In his *home*, the ablest man, the most subtle and suspecting, can be as much a dupe as the simplest. Were it not so as the rule, and the exceptions most rare, this world were the riot of a hell!

And therefore it is that to the household perfidy, in all lands, in all ages, God's curse seems to cleave, and to God's curse man abandons it: he does not honour it by hate, still less will he lighten and share the guilt by descending to revenge. He turns aside with a sickness and loathing, and leaves Nature to purify from the earth the ghastly phenomenon she abhors.

Old man, that she wilfully deceived thee — that she abused thy belief — and denied to thy question — and profaned maidenhood to stealth — all this might have galled thee, — but to these wrongs old men are subjected; — they give mirth to our farces; — maid and lover are privileged impostors. But to have counted the sands in thine hour-glass, to have sate by thy side, marvelling when the worms should have thee — and looked smiling on thy face for the signs of the death-writ, — die quick, old man, the executioner hungers for the fee!

There were no tears in those eyes when they came to the close — the letter fell noiselessly to the floor; and the head sank on the breast, and the hands drooped upon the poor crippled limbs, whose crawl in the sunshine hard youth had grudged. He felt humbled, stunned — crushed; the pride was clean gone from him; the cruel words struck home — worse than a cipher did he then but cumber the earth? At that moment, old Ponto, the setter, shook himself, looked up, and laid his head in his master's lap; and Dash, jealous, rose also, and sprang, not actively, for Dash was old, too, upon his knees, and licked the numbed drooping hands. Now, people praise the fidelity of dogs till the theme is worn out, but nobody knows what a dog is,

unless he has been deceived by men; then, that honest face; then, that sincere caress; then, that coaxing whine that never lied! Well, *then* — what then? A dog is long lived if he live to ten years — small career this to truth and friendship! Now, when Sir Miles felt that he was not deserted, and his look met those four fond eyes, fixed with that strange wistfulness which, in our hours of trouble, the eyes of a dog sympathisingly assume — an odd thought for a sensible man passed into him — showing, more than pages of sombre elegy, how deep was the sudden misanthropy that blackened the world around. "When I am dead," ran that thought, "is there one human being whom I can trust to take charge of the old man's dogs?"

So — let the scene close!

CHAPTER VI.

THE WILL.

THE next day, or rather the next evening, Sir Miles St. John was seated before his unshared chicken; seated alone, and vaguely surprised at himself, in a large comfortable room in his old Hotel, Hanover-square; — yes, he had escaped. Hast thou, O Reader, tasted the luxury of escape from a home where the charm is broken — where Distrust looks askant from the Lares! In vain had Dalibard remonstrated, conjured up dangers, and asked at least to accompany him. Excepting his dogs and his old valet, who was too like a dog in his fond fidelity to rank amongst bipeds, Sir Miles did not wish to have about him a single face, familiar at Laughton, — Dalibard especially. Lucretia's letter had hinted at plans and designs in Dalibard. It might be unjust, it might be ungrateful, but he grew sick at the thought that he was the centre stone of stratagems and plots. The smooth face of the Provençal took a wily expression in his eyes; nay, he thought his very footmen watched his steps as if to count how long before they followed his bier! So, breaking from all roughly, with a shake of his head, and a laconic assertion of business in London, he got into his carriage — his own old bachelor's lumbering travelling carriage — and bade the post-boys drive fast, fast. Then, when he felt alone — quite alone — and the gates of the lodge swung behind him, he rubbed his hands with a schoolboy's glee, and chuckled loud, as if he enjoyed not only the sense but the fun of his safety, as if he had done something prodigiously cunning and clever.

So when he saw himself snug in his old well-remembered

hotel, in the same room as of yore — when returned, brisk and gay, from the breezes of Weymouth, or the *brouillards* of Paris, he thought he shook hands again with his youth. Age and lameness, apoplexy and treason, all were forgotten for the moment. And when, as the excitement died, those grim spectres came back again to his thoughts, they found their victim braced and prepared, standing erect on that hearth, for whose hospitality he paid his guinea a-day — his front, proud and defying. He felt yet that he had fortune and power, that a movement of his hand could raise and strike down, that, at the verge of the tomb, he was armed, to punish or reward, with the balance and the sword. Tripped in the smug waiter, and announced "Mr. Parchmount."

"Set a chair, and show him in."

The lawyer entered.

"My dear Sir Miles, this is indeed a surprise. What has brought you to town?"

"The common whim of the old, Sir. I would alter my will."

Three days did lawyer and client devote to the task, for Sir Miles was minute, and Mr. Parchmount was precise; and little difficulties arose, and changes in the first outline were made; and Sir Miles, from the very depth of his disgust, desired not to act only from passion. In that last deed of his life, the old man was sublime. He sought to rise out of the mortal, fix his eyes on the Great Judge, weigh circumstances and excuses, and keep justice even and serene.

Meanwhile, unconscious of the train laid afar, Lucretia reposed on the mine — *reposed*, indeed, is not the word, for she was agitated and restless, that Mainwaring had not obeyed her summons. She wrote to him again from Southampton the third day of her arrival; but before his answer came, she received this short epistle from London: —

"Mr. Parchmount presents his compliments to Miss Clavering, and, by desire of Sir Miles St. John, requests her not to return to Laughton. Miss Clavering will hear further in a few days, when Sir Miles has concluded the business that has brought him to London."

This letter, if it excited much curiosity, did not produce alarm. It was natural that Sir Miles should be busy in winding up his affairs: his journey to London for that purpose was no ill omen to her prospects, and her thoughts flew back to the one subject that tyrannized over them. Mainwaring's reply, which came two days afterwards, disquieted her much more. He had not found the letter she had left for him in the tree. He was full of apprehensions; he condemned the imprudence of calling on her at Mr. Fielden's; he begged her to renounce the idea of such a risk. He would return again to Guy's Oak, and search more narrowly — had she changed the spot where the former letters were placed? Yet now, not even the non-receipt of her letter, which she ascribed to the care with which she had concealed it amidst the dry leaves and moss, disturbed her so much as the evident constraint with which Mainwaring wrote — the cautious and lukewarm remonstrance which answered her passionate appeal. It may be, that her very doubts, at times, of Mainwaring's affection had increased the ardour of her own attachment; for in some natures, the excitement of fear deepens love more than the calmness of trust. Now with the doubt for the first time flashed the resentment, and her answer to Mainwaring was vehement and imperious. But the next day came a messenger express from London, with a letter from Mr. Parchmount, that arrested for the moment even the fierce current of love.

When the task had been completed — the will signed, sealed, and delivered — the old man had felt a load lifted from his heart. Three or four of his old friends, *bons vivans* like himself, had

seen his arrival duly proclaimed in the newspapers, and had hastened to welcome him. Warmed by the genial sight of faces associated with the frank joys of his youth, Sir Miles, if he did not forget the prudent counsels of Dalibard, conceived a proud bitterness of joy in despising them. Why take such care of the worn-out carcase? His will was made. What was left to life so peculiarly attractive? He invited his friends to a feast worthy of old: seasoned revellers were they, with a free gout for a vent to all indulgence. So they came; and they drank, and they laughed, and they talked back their young days: they saw not the nervous irritation, the strain on the spirits, the heated membrane of the brain, which made Sir Miles the most jovial of all. It was a night of nights — the old fellows were lifted back into their chariots or sedans. Sir Miles alone seemed as steady and sober as if he had supped with Diogenes. His servant, whose respectful admonitions had been awed into silence, lent him his arm to bed, but Sir Miles scarcely touched it. The next morning, when the servant (who slept in the same room) awoke, to his surprise, the glare of a candle streamed on his eyes; he rubbed them: could he see right? — Sir Miles was seated at the table — he must have got up, and lighted a candle to write — noiselessly, indeed. The servant looked and looked, and the stillness of Sir Miles awed him: he was seated on an arm-chair, leaning back. As awe succeeded to suspicion, he sprang up, approached his master, took his hand: it was cold, and fell heavily from his clasp — Sir Miles must have been dead for hours.

The pen lay on the ground, where it had dropped from the hand; the letter on the table was scarcely commenced; the words ran thus —

"LUCRETIA, — You will return no more to my house. You are free as if I were dead; but I shall be just. *Would* that

I had been so to your mother — to your sister! But I am old now, as you say, and — "

To one who could have seen into that poor, proud heart, at the moment the hand paused for ever, what remained unwritten would have been clear. There, was first, the sharp struggle to conquer loathing repugnance, and address at all, the false and degraded one; then came the sharp sting of ingratitude — then the idea of the life grudged, and the grave desired — then the stout victory over scorn — the resolution to be just — then the reproach of the conscience, that for so far less an offence, the sister had been thrown aside — the comfort, perhaps, found in her gentle and neglected child, obstinately repelled — then the conviction of all earthly vanity and nothingness — the look on into life, with the chilling sentiment that affection was gone — that he could never trust again — that he was too old to open his arms to new ties; and then, before felt singly, all these thoughts united, and snapped the chord!

In announcing this mournful intelligence, with more feeling than might have been expected from a lawyer (but even his lawyer loved Sir Miles,) Mr. Parchmount observed, 'that as the deceased lay at an hotel, and as Miss Clavering's presence would not be needed in the performance of the last rites, she would probably forbear the journey to town. Nevertheless, as it was Sir Miles's wish that the will should be opened as soon as possible after his death, and it would, doubtless, contain instructions as to his funeral, it would be well that Miss Clavering and her sister should immediately depute some one to attend the reading of the testament, on their behalf. Perhaps Mr. Fielden would kindly undertake that melancholy office.'

To do justice to Lucretia, it must be said, that her first emotions, on the receipt of this letter, were those of a poignant

and remorseful grief, for which she was unprepared. But how different it is to count on what shall follow death, and know that death has come! Susan's sobbing sympathy availed not, nor Mr. Fielden's pious and tearful exhortations; her own sinful thoughts and hopes came back to her, haunting and stern as furies. She insisted at first upon going to London — gazing once more on the clay: nay, the carriage was at the door, for all yielded to her vehemence; but then her heart misgave her: she did not dare to face the dead! Conscience waived her back from the solemn offices of nature; she hid her face with her hands, shrunk again into her room; and Mr. Fielden, assuming unbidden the responsibility, went alone.

Only Vernon (summoned from Brighton), the good clergyman, and the lawyer, to whom, as sole executor, the will was addressed, and in whose custody it had been left, were present when the seal of the testament was broken. The will was long, as is common when the dust that it disposes of covers some fourteen or fifteen thousand acres. But out of the mass of technicalities and repetitions, these points of interest rose salient — To Charles Vernon, of Vernon Grange, Esq., and his heirs by him lawfully begotten, were left all the lands and woods and manors that covered that space in the Hampshire map, known by the name of the "Laughton property," on condition that he and his heirs assumed the name and arms of St. John; and on the failure of Mr. Vernon's issue, the estate passed, first (with the same conditions) to the issue of Susan Mivers; next, to that of Lucretia Clavering. There the entail ceased — and the contingency fell to the rival ingenuity of lawyers in hunting out, amongst the remote and forgotten descendants of some ancient St. John, the heir-at-law. To Lucretia Clavering, without a word of endearment, was bequeathed £10,000, the usual portion which the house of St. John had allotted to its daughters; to Susan Mivers the same sum, but with the addition of these

words, withheld from her sister — "*and my blessing!*" To Olivier Dalibard, an annuity of £200 a-year; to Honoré Gabriel Varney, £3000; to the Rev. Matthew Fielden, £4000; and the same sum to John Walter Ardworth. To his favourite servant, Henry Jones, an ample provision, and the charge of his dogs Dash and Ponto, with an allowance therefor, to be paid weekly, and cease at their deaths. Poor old man! he made it the interest of their guardian not to grudge *their* lees of life. To his other attendants, suitable and munificent bequests, proportioned to the length of their services. For his body, he desired it buried in the vault of his ancestors without pomp, but without a pretence to a humility which he had not manifested in life; and he requested that a small miniature in his writing-desk should be placed in his coffin. That last injunction was more than a sentiment, it bespoke the moral conviction of the happiness the original might have conferred on his life; — of that happiness his pride had deprived him; nor did he repent, for he had deemed pride a duty: but the mute likeness, buried in his grave — *that* told the might of the sacrifice he had made! Death removes all distinctions, and in the coffin the Lord of Laughton might choose his partner.

When the will had been read, Mr. Parchmount produced two letters, one addressed in the hand of the deceased to Mr. Vernon, the other in the lawyer's own hand to Miss Clavering. The last enclosed the fragment found on Sir Miles's table, and her own letter to Mainwaring, re-directed to her in Sir Miles's boldest and stateliest autograph. He had, no doubt, meant to return it in the letter left uncompleted.

The letter to Vernon contained a copy of Lucretia's fatal epistle, and the following lines to Vernon himself:

"My dear Charles, — With much deliberation, and with natural reluctance to reveal to you my niece's shame, I feel it my

duty to transmit to you the accompanying enclosure, copied from the original with my own hand, which the task sullied. I do so first, because otherwise, you might, as I should have done in your place, feel bound in honour to persist in the offer of your hand — feel bound the more, because Miss Clavering is not my heiress; secondly, because had her attachment been stronger than her interest, and she had refused your offer, you might still have deemed her hardly and capriciously dealt with by me, and not only sought to augment her portion, but have profaned the house of my ancestors by receiving her there, as an honoured and welcome relative and guest. Now, Charles Vernon, I believe, to the utmost of my poor judgment, I have done what is right and just. I have taken into consideration, that this young person has been brought up as a daughter of my house, and what the daughters of my house have received, I bequeath her; I put aside, as far as I can, all resentment of mere family pride; I show that I do so, when I repair my harshness to my poor sister, and leave *both* her children the same provision. And if you exceed what I have done for Lucretia, unless, on more dispassionate consideration than I can give, you conscientiously think me wrong, you insult my memory and impugn my justice; be it in this as your conscience dictates; but I entreat, I adjure, I command at least, that you never knowingly admit by a hearth, hitherto sacred to unblemished truth and honour, a person who has desecrated it with treason. As gentleman to gentleman, I impose on you this solemn injunction. I could have wished to leave that young woman's children barred from the entail; but our old tree has so few branches! You are unwedded; Susan, too. I must take my chance that Miss Clavering's children, if ever they inherit, do not imitate the mother, I conclude she will wed that Mainwaring; her children will have a low-born father. Well, *her* race, at least, is pure. Clavering and St. John are names to guarantee faith and honour; yet you see what *she* is! — Charles

Vernon, if her issue inherit the soul of gentleman, it must come, after all, not from the well-born mother! I have lived to say this; I, who — but perhaps if we had looked more closely into the pedigree of those Claverings! —

"Marry yourself — marry soon, Charles Vernon, my dear kinsman — keep the old house in the old line, and true to its old fame. Be kind and good to my poor — don't strain on the tenants. By the way, Farmer Strongbow owes three years' rent — I forgive him — pension him off — he can do no good to the land, but he was born on it, and must not fall on the parish. But to be kind and good to the poor, not to strain on the tenants, you must learn not to waste, my dear Charles. A needy man can never be generous without being unjust. How give, if you are in debt? You will think of this — now — *now* — while your good heart is soft — while your feelings are moved. Charley Vernon, I think you will shed a tear when you see my arm-chair still and empty. And I would have left you the care of my dogs, but you are thoughtless, and will go much to London, and they are used to the country now. Old Jones will have a cottage in the village; he has promised to live there; drop in now and then, and see poor Ponto and Dash, It is late, and old friends come to dine here. So, if anything happens to me, and we don't meet again, good bye, and God bless you.

"Your affectionate kinsman,

"MILES ST. JOHN."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ENGAGEMENT.

It is somewhat less than three months after the death of Sir Miles St. John — November reigns in London. And "reigns" seems scarcely a metaphysical expression as applied to the sullen, absolute, sway, which that dreary Month — (first in the dynasty of Winter) — spreads over the passive, dejected city. Elsewhere, in England, November is no such gloomy grim fellow as he is described. Over the brown glebes and changed woods in the country, his still face looks contemplative and mild, and he has soft smiles, too, at times — lighting up his taxed vassals the groves — gleaming where the leaves still cling to the boughs — and reflected in dimples from the waves which still glide free from his chains. But as a conqueror, who makes his home in the capital, weighs down with hard policy the mutinous citizens, long ere his iron influence is felt in the province, so the first tyrant of Winter has only rigour and frowns for London. The very aspect of the wayfarers has the look of men newly enslaved; cloaked and muffled, they steal to and fro through the dismal fogs. Even the children creep timidly through the streets; the carriages go cautious and hearse-like along; daylight is dim and obscure; the town is not filled, nor the brisk mirth of Christmas commenced; the unsocial shadows flit amidst the mist, like men on the eve of a fatal conspiracy. Each other month in London has its charms for the experienced. Even from August to October, when The Season lies dormant, and Fashion forbids her sons to be seen within hearing of Bow, the true lover of London finds pleasure still at hand if he search for her duly; — the early walks through

the parks and green Kensington Gardens, which now change their character of resort, and seem rural and countrylike, but yet with more life than the country; for on the benches beneath the trees, and along the sward and up the malls, are living beings enough to interest the eye and divert the thoughts, if you are a guesser into character, and amateur of the human face; fresh nursery-maid and playful children, and the old shabby-genteel buttoned-up officer, musing on half-pay, as he sits alone in some alcove of Kenna, or leans pensive over the rail of the vacant Ring; and early tradesman, or clerk from the suburban lodging, trudging brisk to his business, for business never ceases in London; then at noon, what delight, to escape to the banks at Putney or Richmond — the row up the river — the fishing-punt — the ease at your inn till dark! — or, if this tempt not, still, Autumn shines clear and calm over the roofs, where the smoke has a holiday; and how clean gleam the vistas through the tranquillized thoroughfares, and as you saunter along, you have all London to yourself, Andrew Selkirk, but with the mart of the world for your desert! And when October comes on, it has one characteristic of spring, life busily returns to the city; you see the shops bustling up, trade flowing back; as birds scent the April, so the children of commerce plume their wings, and prepare for the first slack returns of the season. But November! — strange the taste, stout the lungs, grief-defying the heart, of the visiter who finds charms and joy in a London November.

In a small lodging-house in Bulstrode-street, Manchester-square, grouped a family in mourning, who had had the temerity to come to town in November, for the purpose, no doubt, of raising their spirits. In the dull small drawing-room of the dull small house, we introduce to you, first, a middle-aged gentleman, whose dress showed, what dress now fails to show — his profession; nobody could mistake the cut of the cloth, and the shape of the hat, for he had just come in from a walk, and not

from discourtesy, but abstraction, the broad brim still shadowed his pleasant placid face. Parson spoke out in him, from beaver to buckle. By the coal fire, where, through volumes of smoke, fussed and flickered a pretension to flame, sate a middle-aged lady, whom, without being a conjuror, you would pronounce at once to be wife to the parson, and sundry children sate on stools all about her, with one book between them, and a low whispered murmur from their two or three pursed-up lips, announcing that that book was superfluous. By the last of three dim-looking windows, made dimmer by brown moreen draperies, edged genteelly with black cotton velvet, stood a girl, of very soft and pensive expression of features — pretty, unquestionably — excessively pretty — but there was something so delicate and elegant about her — the bend of her head, the shape of her slight figure, the little fair hands crossed one on each other, as the face mournfully and listlessly turned to the window — that 'pretty' would have seemed a word of praise, too often proffered to milliner and serving maid; nevertheless, it was perhaps the right one; — handsome would have implied something statelier and more commanding — beautiful, greater regularity of feature, or richness of colouring. The parson, who, since his entrance, had been walking up and down the small room, with his hands behind him, glancing now and then at the young lady, but not speaking, at length paused from that monotonous exercise, by the chair of his wife, and touched her shoulder. She stopped from her work, which, more engrossing than elegant, was nothing less than what is technically called "the taking in" of a certain blue jacket, which was about to pass from Matthew, the eldest born, to David, the second, and looked up at her husband affectionately; her husband, however, spoke not, he only made a sign, partly with his eyebrow, partly with a jerk of his thumb over his right shoulder, in the direction of the young lady we have described, and then completed the pantomime with a melancholy shake of the head.

The wife turned round, and looked hard, the scissors horizontally raised in one hand, while the other reposed on the cuff of the jacket. At this moment, a low knock was heard at the street-door. The worthy pair saw the girl shrink back, with a kind of tremulous movement; presently there came the sound of a footstep below — the creak of a hinge on the ground floor — and again, all was silent.

"That is Mr. Mainwaring's knock," said one of the children.

The girl left the room abruptly, and, light as was her step, they heard her steal up the stairs.

"My dears," said the parson, "it wants an hour yet to dark, you may go and walk in the square."

"'T is so dull in that ugly square, and they won't let us into the green. I am sure we'd rather stay here," said one of the children, as spokesman for the rest, and they all nestled closer round the hearth.

"But, my dears," said the parson, simply, "I want to talk alone with your mother. However, if you like best to go and keep quiet in your own room, you may do so."

"Or we can go into Susan's?"

"No," said the parson; "you must not disturb Susan."

"She never *used* to care about being disturbed. I wonder what 's come to her?"

The parson made no rejoinder to this half-petulant question. The children consulted together a moment, and resolved that the square, though so dull, was less dull than their own little attic. That being decided, it was the mother's turn to address them. And though Mr. Fielden was as anxious and fond as most fathers, he grew a little impatient before comforters, kerchiefs, and muffatees were arranged, and minute exordiums as to the danger of crossing the street, and the risk of patting strange dogs, &c. &c., were half-way concluded; — with a shrug and a smile, he

at length fairly pushed out the children, shut the door, and drew his chair close to his wife's.

"My dear," he began at once, "I am extremely uneasy about that poor girl."

"What! Miss Clavering? Indeed, she eats almost nothing at all, and sits so moping alone; but she sees Mr. Mainwaring every day. What can *we* do? She is so proud, I 'm afraid of her."

"My dear, I was not thinking of Miss Clavering, though I did not interrupt you, for it is very true that she is much to be pitied."

"And I am sure it was for her sake alone that you agreed to Susan's request, and got Blackman to do duty for you at the vicarage, while we all came up here, in hopes London town would divert her. We left all at sixes and sevens; and I should not at all wonder if John made away with the apples."

"But, I say," resumed the parson, without heeding that mournful foreboding — "I say, I was then only thinking of Susan. You see how pale and sad she is grown."

"Why, she is so very soft-hearted, and she must feel for her sister."

"But her sister, though she thinks much, and keeps aloof from us, is not sad herself; only reserved. On the contrary, I believe she has now got over even poor Sir Miles's death."

"And the loss of the great property!"

"Fie, Mary!" said Mr. Fielden, almost austerely.

Mary looked down, rebuked, for she was not one of the high-spirited wives who despise their husbands for goodness.

"I beg pardon, my dear," she said, meekly; "it was very wrong in me; but I cannot — do what I will — I cannot like that Miss Clavering."

"The more need to judge her with charity. And if, what I

fear is the case, I'm sure we can't feel too much compassion for the poor blinded young lady."

"Bless my heart, Mr. Fielden, what is it you mean?"

The parson looked round to be sure the door was quite closed, and replied, in a whisper — "I mean, that I fear William Mainwaring loves not Lucretia, but Susan."

The scissors fell from the hand of Mrs. Fielden; and though one point stuck in the ground, and the other point threatened war upon flounces and toes, strange to say, she did not even stoop to remove the *chevaux de frise*.

"Why, then, he 's a most false-hearted young man!"

"To blame, certainly," said Fielden; "I don't say to the contrary, though I like the young man, and am sure that he 's more timid than false. I may now tell you — for I want your advice, Mary — what I kept secret before. When Mainwaring visited us, many months ago, at Southampton, he confessed to me that he felt warmly for Susan, and asked if I thought Sir Miles would consent. I knew too well how proud the poor old gentleman was to give him any such hopes. So he left very honourably. You remember, after he went, that Susan's spirits were low — you remarked it."

"Yes, indeed, I remember. But when the first shock of Sir Miles's death was over, she got back her sweet colour, and looked cheerful enough."

"Because, perhaps, then, she felt that she had a fortune to bestow on Mr. Mainwaring, and thought all obstacle was over."

"Why, how clever you are! How did you get at her thoughts?"

"My own folly — my own rash folly," almost groaned Mr. Fielden. "For, not guessing that Mr. Mainwaring could have got engaged meanwhile to Lucretia, and suspecting how it was with Susan's poor little heart, I let out, in a jest — Heaven

forgive me! — what William had said; and the dear child blushed, and kissed me, and — why a day or two after, when it was fixed that we should come up to London, Lucretia informed me, with her freezing politeness, that she was to marry Mainwaring herself, as soon as her first mourning was over."

"Poor dear — dear Susan!"

"Susan behaved like an angel; and when I broached it to her, I thought she was calm; and I am sure she prayed with her whole heart that both might be happy."

"I 'm sure she did. What is to be done? I understand it all now. Dear me, dear me! — a sad piece of work, indeed." And Mrs. Fielden abstractedly picked up the scissors.

"It was not till our coming to town, and Mr. Mainwaring's visits to Lucretia, that her strength gave way."

"A hard sight to bear: I never could have borne it, my love. If I had seen you paying court to another, I should have — I don't know what I should have done! But what an artful wretch this young Mainwaring must be."

"Not very artful; for you see that he looks even sadder than Susan. He got entangled somehow, to be sure. Perhaps he had given up Susan in despair; and Miss Clavering, if haughty, is no doubt a very superior young lady; and, I dare say, it is only now in seeing them both together, and comparing the two, that he feels what a treasure he has lost. Well, what do you advise, Mary? Mainwaring, no doubt, is bound in honour to Miss Clavering; but she will be sure to discover, sooner or later, the state of his feelings, and then I tremble for both. I 'm sure she will never be happy, while he will be wretched; and Susan — I dare not think upon Susan — she has a cough that goes to my heart."

"So she has; that cough! — you don't know the money I spend on black-currant jelly! What 's my advice? why I 'd

speak to Miss Clavering at once, if I dared. I 'm sure love never will break *her* heart; and she 's so proud, she 'd throw him off without a sigh, if she knew how things stood."

"I believe you are right," said Mr. Fielden; "for truth is the best policy after all. Still, it 's scarce my business to meddle; and if it were not for Susan — well, well, I must think of it, and pray Heaven to direct me."

This conference suffices to explain to the reader the stage to which the history of Lucretia had arrived. Willingly we pass over what it were scarcely possible to describe — her first shock at the fall from the expectations of her life; — fortune, rank, and what she valued more than either, power — crushed at a blow. From the dark and sullen despair into which she was first plunged, she was roused into hope — into something like joy — by Mainwaring's letters. Never had they been so warm and so tender; for the young man felt not only poignant remorse that he had been the cause of her downfall (though she broke it to him with more delicacy than might have been expected from the state of her feelings and the hardness of her character), but he felt also imperiously the obligations which her loss rendered more binding than ever. He persuaded, he urged, he forced himself into affection; and, probably, without a murmur of his heart, he would have gone with her to the altar, and, once wedded, custom and duty would have strengthened the chain imposed on himself, had it not been for Lucretia's fatal eagerness to see him, to come up to London, where she induced him to meet her — for with her came Susan; and in Susan's averted face, and trembling hand, and mute avoidance of his eye, he read all which the poor dissembler fancied she concealed. But the die was cast, the union announced, the time fixed, and day by day he came to the house, to leave it in anguish and despair. A feeling they shared in common, caused these two unhappy persons to shun each other. Mainwaring rarely came into the usual

sitting-room of the family; and when he did so, chiefly in the evening, Susan usually took refuge in her own room. If they met, it was by accident, on the stairs, or at the sudden opening of a door, then not only no word, but scarcely even a look was exchanged; neither had the courage to face the other. Perhaps, of the two, this reserve weighed most on Susan; perhaps she most yearned to break the silence, for she thought she divined the cause of Mainwaring's gloomy and mute constraint, in the upbraidings of his conscience, which might doubtless recall — if no positive pledge to Susan — at least, those words and tones which betray the one heart, and seek to allure, the other; and the profound melancholy stamped on his whole person, apparent even to her hurried glance, touched her with a compassion free from all the bitterness of selfish reproach. She fancied she could die happy if she could remove that cloud from his brow, that shadow from his conscience. Die — for she thought not of life. She loved gently, quietly; not with the vehement passion that belongs to stronger natures; but it was the love of which the young and the pure have died. The face of the Genius was calm and soft; and only by the lowering of the hand do you see that the torch burns out, and that the image too serene for earthly love, is the genius of loving Death.

Absorbed in the egotism of her passion — increased, as is ever the case with women, even the worst, by the sacrifices it had cost her — and if that passion paused, by the energy of her ambition, which already began to scheme and re-construct new scaffolds to repair the ruined walls of the past, Lucretia as yet had not detected what was so apparent to the simple sense of Mr. Fielden. That Mainwaring was grave, and thoughtful, and abstracted, she ascribed only to his grief at the thought of her loss, and his anxieties for her altered future; and in her efforts to console him, her attempts to convince him that greatness in England did not consist only in lands and manors — that in the

higher walks of life which conduct to the Temple of Renown, the leaders of the procession are the aristocracy of knowledge and of intellect — she so betrayed, not generous emulation and high-souled aspiring, but the dark, unscrupulous, tortuous ambition of cunning, stratagem, and intrigue, that instead of feeling grateful and encouraged, he shuddered and revolted. How, accompanied and led by a spirit which he felt to be stronger and more commanding than his own — how preserve the whiteness of his soul, the uprightness of his honour? Already he felt himself debased. But in the still trial of domestic intercourse, with the daily, hourly dripping on the stone, in the many struggles between truth and falsehood, guile and candour, which men — and, above all, ambitious men — must wage, what darker angel would whisper him in his monitor? Still he was bound — bound with an iron band — he writhed, but dreamed not of escape.

The day after that of Fielden's conference with his wife, an unexpected visiter came to the house. Olivier Dalibard called. He had not seen Lucretia since she had left Laughton, nor had any correspondence passed between them. He came at dusk, just after Mainwaring's daily visit was over, and Lucretia was still in the parlour which she had appropriated to herself. Her brow contracted as his name was announced, and the maid-servant lighted the candle on the table, stirred the fire, and gave a tug at the curtains. Her eye, glancing from his, round the mean room, with its dingy, horsehair furniture, involuntarily implied the contrast between the past state and the present, which his sight could scarcely help to impress on her. But she welcomed him with her usual stately composure, and without reference to what had been. Dalibard was secretly anxious to discover if she suspected himself of any agency in the detection of the eventful letter, and, assured by her manner that no such thought was yet harboured, he thought it best to imitate her own reserve. He assumed, however, a manner that, far more respect-

ful than he ever before observed to his pupil, was nevertheless sufficiently kind and familiar to restore them gradually to their old footing; and that he succeeded was apparent, when, after a pause, Lucretia said abruptly — "How did Sir Miles St. John discover my correspondence with Mr. Mainwaring?"

"Is it possible that you are ignorant? Ah, how—how should you know it?" And Dalibard so simply explained the occurrence, in which, indeed, it was impossible to trace the hand that had moved springs which seemed so entirely set at work by an accident, that despite the extreme suspiciousness of her nature, Lucretia did not see a pretence for accusing him. Indeed, when he related the little subterfuge of Gabriel, his attempt to save her by taking the letter on himself, she felt thankful to the boy, and deemed Gabriel's conduct quite in keeping with his attachment to herself. And this accounted satisfactorily for the only circumstance that had ever troubled her with a doubt — viz., the legacy left to Gabriel. She knew enough of Sir Miles to be aware that he would be grateful to any one who had saved the name of his niece, even while most embittered against her, from the shame attached to clandestine correspondence.

"It is strange, nevertheless," said she, thoughtfully, after a pause, "that the girl should have detected the letter, concealed, as it was, by the leaves that covered it."

"But," answered Dalibard, readily, "you see two or three persons had entered before, and their feet must have displaced the leaves."

"Possibly; the evil is now past recall."

"And Mr. Mainwaring? do you still adhere to one who has cost you so much, poor child?"

"In three months more I shall be his wife."

Dalibard sighed deeply, but offered no remonstrance.

"Well," he said, taking her hand with mingled reverence and affection — "well, I oppose your inclinations no more, for

now there is nothing to risk, you are mistress of your own fortune; and since Mainwaring has talents, that fortune will suffice for a career. Are you at length convinced that I have conquered my folly? that I was disinterested when I incurred your displeasure? If so, can you restore to me your friendship? You will have some struggle with the world, and, with my long experience of men and life, even I, the poor exile, may assist you."

And so thought Lucretia; for with some dread of Dalibard's craft, she yet credited his attachment to herself, and she felt profound admiration for an intelligence more consummate and accomplished than any ever yet submitted to her comprehension. From that time, Dalibard became an habitual visiter at the house; he never interfered with Lucretia's interviews with Mainwaring; he took the union for granted, and conversed with her cheerfully on the prospects before her; he ingratiated himself with the Fieldens, played with the children, made himself at home, and in the evenings when Mainwaring, as often as he could find the excuse, absented himself from the family circle, he contrived to draw Lucretia into more social intercourse with her homely companions than she had before condescended to admit. Good Mr. Fielden rejoiced: here was the very person, the old friend of Sir Miles, the preceptor of Lucretia herself, evidently most attached to her, having influence over her — the very person to whom to confide his embarrassment. One day, therefore, when Dalibard had touched his heart by noticing the paleness of Susan, he took him aside, and told him all. "And now," concluded the pastor, hoping he had found one to relieve him of his dreaded and ungracious task, "don't you think that I — or, rather, you — as so old a friend, should speak frankly to Miss Clavering herself."

"No, indeed," said the Provençal, quickly; "if we spoke to her she would disbelieve us. She would no doubt appeal to Mainwaring, and Mainwaring would have no choice but to con-

tradict us. Once put on his guard, he would control his very sadness. Lucretia offended, might leave your house, and certainly she would regard her sister as having influenced your confession — a position unworthy Miss Mivers. But do not fear; if the evil be so, it carries with it its inevitable remedy. Let Lucretia discover it herself; but, pardon me, she must have seen, at your first reception of Mainwaring, that he had before been acquainted with you?"

"She was not in the room when we first received Mainwaring, and I have always been distant to him, as you may suppose, for I felt disappointed and displeased. Of course, however, she is aware that we knew him before she did. What of that?"

"Why, do you think then he told her at Laughton of this acquaintance? — that he spoke of Susan? — I suspect not."

"I cannot say, I am sure," said Mr. Fielden.

"Ask her that question accidentally, and for the rest be discreet, my dear Sir. I thank you for your confidence. I will watch well over my poor young pupil. She must not, indeed, be sacrificed to a man whose affections are engaged elsewhere."

Dalibard trod on air as he left the house; his very countenance had changed; he seemed ten years younger. It was evening; and suddenly, as he came into Oxford-street, he encountered a knot of young men — noisy and laughing loud — obstructing the pavement, breaking jests on the more sober passengers, and attracting the especial and admiring attention of sundry ladies in plumed hats and scarlet pelisses; for the streets then enjoyed a gay liberty which has vanished from London with the lanterns of the watchmen. Noisiest, and most conspicuous of these descendants of the Mohawks, the sleek and orderly scholar beheld the childish figure of his son. Nor did Gabriel shrink from his father's eye, stern and scornful as it was, but rather braved the glance with an impudent leer.

Right, however, in the midst of the groupe, strode the Provençal, and laying his hand very gently on the boy's shoulder, he said — "My son, come with me."

Gabriel looked irresolute, and glanced at his companions. Delighted at the prospect of a scene, they now gathered round, with countenances and gestures that seemed little disposed to acknowledge the parental authority.

"Gentlemen," said Dalibard, turning a shade more pale, for though morally most resolute, physically he was not brave— "gentlemen, I must beg you to excuse me — this child is my son!"

"But Art is his mother," replied a tall rawboned young man, with long tawney hair streaming down from a hat very much battered. "At the juvenile age, the child is consigned to the mother! Have I said it?" and he turned round theatrically to his comrades.

"Bravo!" cried the rest, clapping their hands.

"Down with all tyrants and fathers — hip, hip, hurrah!" and the hideous diapason nearly split the drum of the ears into which it resounded.

"Gabriel," whispered the father, "you had better follow me, *had you not?* Reflect!" So saying, he bowed low to the unpropitious assembly, and, as if yielding the victory, stepped aside, and crossed over towards Bond-street.

Before the din of derision and triumph died away, Dalibard looked back, and saw Gabriel behind him.

"Approach, Sir," he said, and as the boy stood still, he added; "I promise peace, if you will accept it."

"Peace, then!" answered Gabriel, and he joined his father's side.

"So," said Dalibard, "when I consented to your studying Art, as you call it, under your mother's most respectable brother, I ought to have contemplated what would be the natural

and becoming companions of the rising Raffaele I have given to the world."

"I own, Sir," replied Gabriel, demurely, "that they are riotous fellows, but some of them are clever, and —"

"And excessively drunk," interrupted Dalibard, examining the gait of his son. "Do you learn that accomplishment also, by way of steadying your hand for the easel?"

"No, Sir; I like wine well enough, but I would not be drunk for the world. I see people when they are drunk are mere fools — let out their secrets, and show themselves up."

"Well said," replied the father, almost admiringly; "but a truce with this bantering, Gabriel. Can you imagine that I will permit you any longer to remain with that vagabond Varney, and yon crew of *Vauriens?* You will come home with me; and if you must be a painter, I will look out for a more trustworthy master."

"I shall stay where I am," answered Gabriel, firmly, and compressing his lips with a force that left them bloodless.

"What, boy! do I hear right? Dare you disobey me? Dare you defy?"

"Not in your house, so I will not enter it again."

Dalibard laughed, mockingly.

"*Peste!* but this is modest! You are not of age yet, Mr. Varney; — you are not free from a father's tyrannical control."

"The law does not own you as my father, I am told, Sir; you have said my name rightly — it is Varney, not Dalibard. We have no rights over each other; so at least says Tom Passmore, and his father 's a lawyer!"

Dalibard's hand griped his son's arm fiercely. Despite his pain, which was acute, the child uttered no cry; but he growled beneath his teeth, "Beware! beware! — or my mother's son may avenge her death!"

Dalibard removed his hand, and staggered as if struck. Gliding from his side, Gabriel seized the occasion to escape; he paused, however, midway in the dull lamp-lit kennel, when he saw himself out of reach, and then approaching cautiously, said — "I know I am a boy, but you have made me man enough to take care of myself. Mr. Varney, my uncle, will maintain me — when of age, old Sir Miles has provided for me. Leave me in peace — treat me as free; and I will visit you, help you when you want me — obey you still, — yes, follow your instructions; for I know you are" — he paused — "you are *wise;* but if you seek again to make me your slave, you will only find me your foe. Good night; and remember that a bastard has no father!"

With these words he moved on, and hurrying down the street, turned the corner, and vanished.

Dalibard remained motionless for some minutes — at length, he muttered, "Ay, let him go, he is dangerous! — What son ever revolted even from the worst father, and throve in life? — Food for the gibbet! What matters?"

When next Dalibard visited Lucretia, his manner was changed — the cheerfulness he had before assumed gave place to a kind of melancholy compassion; he no longer entered into her plans for the future, but would look at her mournfully, start up, and walk away. She would have attributed the change to some return of his ancient passion, but she heard him once murmur with unspeakable pity, "Poor child—poor child!" A vague apprehension seized her — first, indeed, caught from some remarks dropped by Mr. Fielden, which were less discreet than Dalibard had recommended. A day or two afterwards, she asked Mainwaring, carelessly, "why he had never spoken to her at Laughton of his acquaintance with Fielden."

"You asked me that before," he said, somewhat sullenly.

"Did I? I forget! But how was it? Tell me again."

"I scarcely know," he replied, confusedly; "we were always talking of each other, or poor Sir Miles — our own hopes and fears."

This was true, and a lover's natural excuse. In the present of love all the past is forgotten.

"Still," said Lucretia, with her sidelong glance — "still, as you must have seen much of my own sister —"

Mainwaring, while she spoke, was at work on a button on his gaiter — (gaiters were then worn tight at the ancle) — the effort brought the blood to his forehead.

"But," he said, still stooping at his occupation, "you were so little intimate with your sister, — I feared to offend. Family differences are so difficult to approach."

Lucretia was satisfied at the moment. For so vast was her stake in Mainwaring's heart, so did her whole heart and soul grapple to the rock left serene amidst the deluge, that she habitually and resolutely thrust from her mind all the doubts that at times invaded it.

"I know," she would often say to herself — "I know he does not love as I do — but man never can, never ought to love as woman! Were I a man, I should scorn myself if I could be so absorbed in one emotion as I am proud to be now — I, poor woman! — I know," again she would think, — "I know how suspicious and distrustful I am — I must not distrust *him* — I shall only irritate — I may lose him: I *dare* not distrust — it would be too dreadful."

Thus, as a system vigorously embraced by a determined mind, she had schooled and forced herself into reliance on her lover. His words now, we say, satisfied her at the moment; but afterwards, in absence, they were recalled, in spite of herself — in the midst of fears, shapeless and undefined. Involuntarily she began to examine the countenance, the movements, of her sister — to court Susan's society more than she had done — for

her previous indifference had now deepened into bitterness. Susan, the neglected and despised, had become her equal — nay, more than her equal — Susan's children would have precedence to her own in the heritage of Laughton! Hitherto she had never deigned to talk to her in the sweet familiarity of sisters so placed — never deigned to confide to her those feelings for her future husband, which burned lone and ardent in the close vault of her guarded heart. Now, however, she began to name him, wind her arm into Susan's, talk of love and home, and the days to come; and as she spoke she read the workings of her sister's face. That part of the secret grew clear almost at the first glance. Susan loved — loved William Mainwaring; but was it not a love hopeless and unreturned? Might not this be the cause that had made Mainwaring so reserved? He might have seen, or conjectured, a conquest he had not sought; and hence, with manly delicacy, he had avoided naming Susan to Lucretia; and now, perhaps, sought the excuses which at times had chafed and wounded her for not joining the household circle. If one of those who glance over these pages chance to be a person more than usually able and acute — a person who has loved and been deceived — he or she, no matter which, will perhaps recall those first moments when the doubt, long put off, insisted to be heard; a weak and foolish heart gives way to the doubt at once, not so the subtler and more powerful; it rather, on the contrary, recalls all the little circumstances that justify trust and make head against suspicion; it will not render the citadel at the mere sound of the trumpet; it arms all its forces, and bars its gates on the foe. Hence it is, that the persons most easy to dupe in matters of affection are usually those most astute in the larger affairs of life. Moliere, reading every riddle in the vast complexities of human character, and clinging, in self-imposed credulity, to his profligate wife, is a type of a striking truth. Still, a foreboding, a warning instinct withheld Lucretia from plumbing farther into

the deeps of her own fears. So horrible was the thought that she had been deceived, that rather than face it, she would have preferred to deceive herself. This poor bad heart shrunk from inquiry — it trembled at the idea of condemnation. She hailed with a sentiment of release that partook of rapture, Susan's abrupt announcement one morning, that she had accepted an invitation from some relations of her father, to spend some time with them at their villa near Hampstead; she was to go the end of the week. Lucretia hailed it, though she saw the cause. Susan shrank from the name of Mainwaring on Lucretia's lips — shrank from the familiar intercourse so ruthlessly forced on her! With a bright eye, that day, Lucretia met her lover; yet she would not tell him of Susan's intended departure — she had not the courage.

Dalibard was foiled. This contradiction in Lucretia's temper —so suspicious—so determined—puzzled even his penetration. He saw that bolder tactics were required. He waylaid Mainwaring on the young man's way to his lodgings, and, after talking to him on indifferent matters, asked him carelessly, whether he did not think Susan far gone in a decline. Affecting not to notice the convulsive start with which the question was received, he went on —

"There is evidently something on her mind — I observe that her eyes are often red as with weeping — poor girl! — perhaps some silly love affair. However, we shall not see her again before your marriage; she is going away in a day or two; the change of air may possibly yet restore her: I own, though, I fear the worst. At this time of the year, and in your climate, such complaints as I take hers to be are rapid. Good day. We may meet this evening."

Terror-stricken at these barbarous words, Mainwaring no sooner reached his lodgings than he wrote and despatched a note to Fielden, entreating him to call.

The Vicar obeyed the summons, and found Mainwaring in a state of mind bordering on distraction; nor when Susan was named, did Fielden's words take the shape of comfort; for he himself was seriously alarmed for her health; the sound of her low cough rang in his ears, and he rather heightened than removed the picture which haunted Mainwaring — Susan, stricken, dying, broken-hearted!

Tortured both in heart and conscience, Mainwaring felt as if he had but one wish left in the world — to see Susan once more! What to say, he scarce knew; but for her to depart — depart, perhaps, to her grave, believing him coldly indifferent — for her not to know, at least, his struggles, and pronounce his pardon, was a thought beyond endurance. After such an interview, both would have new fortitude — each would unite in encouraging the other in the only step left to honour. And this desire he urged upon Fielden with all the eloquence of passionate grief, as he entreated him to permit and procure one last conference with Susan. But this, the plain sense and straightforward conscience of the good man long refused. If Mainwaring had been left in the position to explain his heart to Lucretia, it would not have been for Fielden to object; but to have a clandestine interview with one sister while betrothed to the other, bore in itself a character too equivocal to meet with the simple Vicar's approval.

"What can you apprehend?" exclaimed the young man, almost fiercely — for, harassed and tortured, his mild nature was driven to bay. "Can you suppose that I shall encourage my own misery by the guilty pleadings of unavailing love? All that I ask is the luxury — yes, the luxury, long unknown to me, of candour — to place fairly and manfully before Susan, the position in which fate has involved me. Can you suppose that we shall not both take comfort and strength from each other? Our duty is plain and obvious; but it grows less painful, encouraged by the lips of a companion in suffering. I tell you fairly, that see

Susan, I will and must. I will watch round her home wherever it be — hour after hour — come what may, I will find my occasion. Is it not better that the interview should be under your roof, within the same walls which shelter her sister? *There*, the place itself imposes restraint on despair. Oh, Sir, this is no time for formal scruples — be merciful, I beseech you, not to me, but to Susan. I judge of her by myself. I know that I shall go to the altar more resigned to the future, if for once I can give vent to what weighs upon my heart. She will then see as I do, that the path before me is inevitable, she will compose herself to face the fate that compels us. We shall swear tacitly to each other, not to love, but to conquer love. Believe me, Sir, I am not selfish in this prayer: an instinct, the intuition which human grief has into the secrets of human grief, assures me that that which I ask, is the best consolation you can afford to Susan. You own she is ill — suffering. Are not your fears for her very life — O Heaven, for her very life — gravely awakened? And yet you see, we have been silent to each other! Can speech be more fatal in its results than silence? Oh, for her sake, hear me!"

The good man's tears fell fast — his scruples were shaken; there was truth in what Mainwaring urged. He did not yet yield; but he promised to reflect, and inform Mainwaring, by a line, in the evening. Finding this was all he could effect, the young man at last suffered him to leave the house, and Fielden hastened to take counsel of Dalibard; that wily persuader soon reasoned away Mr. Fielden's last faint objection — it now only remained to procure Susan's assent to the interview, and to arrange that it should be undisturbed. Mr. Fielden should take out the children the next morning. Dalibard volunteered to contrive the absence of Lucretia at the hour appointed. Mrs. Fielden, alone, should remain within, and might, if it were judged proper, be present at the interview, which was fixed for the forenoon in the

usual drawing-room. Nothing but Susan's consent was now necessary, and Mr. Fielden ascended to her room. He knocked twice — no sweet voice bade him enter; he opened the door gently — Susan was in prayer. At the opposite corner of the room, by the side of her bed, she knelt, her face buried in her hands, and he heard, low and indistinct, the murmur broken by the sob. But gradually, and, as he stood unperceived, sob and murmur ceased — prayer had its customary and blessed effect with the pure and earnest. And when Susan rose, though the tears yet rolled down her cheeks, the face was serene as an angel's.

The pastor approached, and took her hand; — a blush then broke over her countenance — she trembled, and her eyes fell on the ground. "My child," he said, solemnly, "God will hear you!" And, after those words, there was a long silence. He then drew her passively towards a seat, and sate down by her, embarrassed how to begin. At length, he said, looking somewhat aside, "Mr. Mainwaring has made me a request — a prayer which relates to you, and which I refer to you. He asks you to grant him an interview, before you leave us — to-morrow, if you will. I refused at first — I am in doubt still; for, my dear, I have always found that, when the feelings move us, our duty becomes less clear to the human heart — corrupt, we know — but still it is often a safer guide than our reason; I never knew reason unerring, except in mathematics; we have no Euclid (and the good man smiled mournfully) in the problems of real life; I won't urge you one way or the other — I put the case before you. Would it, as the young man says, give you comfort and strength to see him once again while, while — in short, before your sister is — I mean before — that is, would it soothe you *now*, to have an unreserved communication with him? He implores it. What shall I answer?"

"This trial, too!" muttered Susan, almost inaudibly —

"this trial which I once yearned for" — and the hand clasped in Fielden's was as cold as ice; then, turning her eyes to her guardian somewhat wildly, she cried — "But to what end? what object? why should he wish to see me?"

"To take greater courage to do his duty — to feel less unhappy at — at —"

"I will see him," interrupted Susan, firmly — "he is right, it will strengthen both — I will see him!"

"But human nature is weak, my child; if my heart be so now, what will be yours?"

"Fear me not," answered Susan, with a sad wandering smile; and she repeated, vacantly, "I will see him!"

The good man looked at her — threw his arms round her wasted form, and, lifting up his eyes, his lips stirred with such half-syllabled words as fathers breathe on high.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DISCOVERY.

DALIBARD had undertaken to get Lucretia from the house; in fact, her approaching marriage rendered necessary a communication with Mr. Parchmount, as executor to her uncle's will, relative to the transfer of her portion; and she had asked Dalibard to accompany her thither, for her pride shrank from receiving the lawyer in the shabby parlour of the shabby lodging-house; she therefore, that evening, fixed the next day, before noon, for the visit. A carriage was hired for the occasion, and, when it drove off, Mr. Fielden took his children a walk to Primrose-hill, and called, as was agreed, on Mainwaring by the way.

The carriage had scarcely rattled fifty yards through the street when Dalibard fixed his eyes, with deep and solemn commiseration, on Lucretia. Hitherto, with masterly art, he had kept aloof from direct explanations with his pupil; he knew that she would distrust no one like himself. The plot was now ripened, and it was time for the main agent to conduct the catastrophe. The look was so expressive that Lucretia felt a chill at her heart, and could not help exclaiming, "What has happened? you have some terrible tidings to communicate?"

"I have indeed to say that which may, perhaps, cause you to hate me for ever; as we hate those who report our afflictions. I must endure this; I have struggled long between my indignation and my compassion. Rouse up your strong mind, and hear me. Mainwaring loves your sister!"

Lucretia uttered a cry that seemed scarcely to come from a human voice —

"No — no!" she gasped out, "do not tell me. I will hear no more — I will not believe you!"

With an inexpressible pity and softness in his tone, this man, whose career had given him such profound experience in the frailties of the human heart, continued: "I do not ask you to believe me, Lucretia, I would not now speak, if you had not the opportunity to convince yourself; even those with whom you live are false to you; at this moment, they have arranged all, for Mainwaring to steal, in your absence, to your sister; in a few moments more he will be with her; if you yourself would learn what passes between them, you have the power."

"I have — I have not — not — the courage; — drive on — faster — faster."

Dalibard again was foiled. In this strange cowardice, there was something so terrible, yet so touching, that it became sublime — it was the grasp of a drowning soul at the last plank.

"You are right, perhaps," he said, after a pause; and wisely forbearing all taunt and resistance, he left the heart to its own workings.

Suddenly, Lucretia caught at the check-string — "Stop," she exclaimed — "stop! I will not, I cannot endure this suspense, to last through a life! I will learn the worst. Bid him drive back."

"We must descend and walk; you forget we must enter unsuspected;" and Dalibard, as the carriage stopped, opened the door, and let down the steps.

Lucretia recoiled, then pressing one hand to her heart, she descended without touching the arm held out to her.

Dalibard bade the coachman wait, and they walked back to the house.

"Yes, he may see her," exclaimed Lucretia, her face brightening. "Ah, *there* you have not deceived me; I see your stratagem — I despise it; I know she loves him; she has sought this interview. He is so mild and gentle, so fearful to give pain; he has consented, from pity — that is all. Is he not pledged to me? He, so candid, so ingenuous! There must be truth somewhere in the world. If he is false, where find truth? Dark man, must I look for it in you? — *you!*"

"It is not my truth I require you to test; I pretend not to truth universal; I can be true to one, as you may yet discover. But I own your belief is not impossible; my interest in you may have made me rash and unjust — what you may over-hear, far from destroying, may confirm for ever your happiness. Would that it may be so!"

"It *must* be so," returned Lucretia, with a fearful gloom on her brow and in her accent; "I will interpret every word to my own salvation."

Dalibard's countenance changed, despite his usual control over it. He had set all his chances upon this cast, and it was more hazardous than he had deemed. He had counted too much upon the jealousy of common natures. After all, how little to the ear of one resolved to deceive herself might pass between these young persons, meeting not to avow attachment, but to take courage from each other! what restraint might they impose on their feelings! Still the game must be played out.

As they now neared the house, Dalibard looked carefully round, lest they should encounter Mainwaring on his way to it. He had counted on arriving before the young man could get there.

"But," said Lucretia, breaking silence, with an ironical smile — "but (for your tender anxiety for me has, no doubt, provided all means and contrivance, all necessary aids to base-

ness and eaves-dropping, that can assure my happiness,) how am I to be present at this interview?"

"I have provided, as you say," answered Dalibard, in the tone of a man deeply hurt, "those means which I, who have found the world one foe and one traitor, deemed the best, to distinguish falsehood from truth. I have arranged that we shall enter the house unsuspected. Mainwaring and your sister will be in the drawing-room — the room next to it will be vacant, as Mr. Fielden is from home; there is but a glass-door between the two chambers."

"Enough, enough!" and Lucretia turned round, and placed her hand lightly on the Provençal's arm. "The next hour will decide whether the means you suggest, to learn truth and defend safety, will be familiar or loathsome to me for life — will decide whether trust is a madness — whether you, my youth's teacher, are the wisest of men, or only the most dangerous."

"Believe me, or not, when I say, I would rather the decision should condemn me; for I, too, have need of confidence in men."

Nothing further was said; the dull street was quiet and desolate as usual. Dalibard had taken with him the key of the house-door. The door opened noiselessly — they were in the house. Mainwaring's cloak was in the hall; he had arrived a few moments before them. Dalibard pointed silently to that evidence in favour of his tale. Lucretia bowed her head, but with a look that implied defiance; and (still without a word) she ascended the stairs, and entered the room appointed for concealment. But as she entered, at the further corner of the chamber she saw Mrs. Fielden seated — seated, remote and out of hearing. The good-natured woman had yielded to Mainwaring's prayer, and Susan's silent look that enforced it, to let their interview be unwitnessed. She did not perceive Lucretia till the last walked glidingly, but firmly, up to her, placed a burning hand on her

lips, and whispered — "Hush, betray me not; my happiness for life — Susan's — his — are at stake! I must hear what passes; it is *my* fate that is deciding. Hush — I command! — for I have the right!"

Mrs. Fielden was awed and startled; and before she could recover even breath, Lucretia had quitted her side, and taken her post at the fatal door. She lifted the corner of the curtain from the glass panel, and looked in.

Mainwaring was seated at a little distance from Susan, whose face was turned from her. Mainwaring's countenance was in full view. But it was Susan's voice that met her ear; and though sweet and low, it was distinct, and even firm. It was evident from the words that the conference had but just begun.

"Indeed, Mr. Mainwaring, you have nothing to explain — nothing of which to accuse yourself. It was not for this, believe me" — and here Susan turned her face, and its aspect of heavenly innocence met the dry lurid eye of the unseen witness — "not for this, believe me, that I consented to see you. If I did so, it was only because I thought — because I feared from your manner, when we met at times, still more from your evident avoidance to meet me at all, that you were unhappy (for I know you kind and honest); unhappy at the thought that you had wounded me, and my heart could not bear that, nor, perhaps, my pride either. That you should have forgotten me —"

"Forgotten you!"

"That you should have been captivated" (continued Susan, in a more hurried tone) "by one so superior to me in all things as Lucretia, is very natural. I thought, then — thought only — that nothing could cloud your happiness but some reproach of a conscience too sensitive. For this I have met you — met you without a thought which Lucretia would have a right to blame, could she read my heart; met you (and the voice for the first

time faltered), that I might say, 'Be at peace: it is your sister that addresses you. Requite Lucretia's love — it is deep and strong; give her as she gives to you — a whole heart; and in your happiness, I, your sister — sister to both — *I* shall be blest.'" With a smile inexpressibly touching and ingenuous, she held out her hand as she ceased. Mainwaring sprang forward, and, despite her struggle, pressed it to his lips — his heart.

"Oh," he exclaimed, in broken accents, which gradually became more clear and loud, "what — what have I lost! — lost for ever! No, no, I will be worthy of you! I do not — I dare not say that I love you still! I feel what I owe to Lucretia. How I became first ensnared, infatuated; how, with your image graven so deeply here — "

"Mainwaring — Mr. Mainwaring — I must not hear you. Is this your promise?"

"Yes, you must hear me yet. How I became engaged to your sister — so different, indeed, from you — I start in amaze and bewilderment when I seek to conjecture. But so it was. For me she has forfeited fortune, rank — all which that proud, stern heart so prized and coveted. Heaven is my witness how I have struggled to repay her affection with my own; if I cannot succeed, at least, all that faith and gratitude can give are hers. Yes; when I leave you, comforted by your forgiveness, your prayers, I shall have strength to tear you from my heart — it is my duty — my fate. With a firm step I will go to these abhorred nuptials. Oh, shudder not; turn away! Forgive the word; but I must speak — my heart will out — yes, abhorred nuptials! Between my grave and the altar, would — would that I had a choice!"

From this burst, which in vain from time to time Susan had sought to check, Mainwaring was startled by an apparition which

froze his veins, as a ghost from the grave. The door was thrown open, and Lucretia stood in the aperture — stood, gazing on him, face to face; and her own was so colourless, so rigid, so locked in its livid and awful solemnity of aspect, that it was, indeed, as one risen from the dead.

Dismayed by the abrupt cry, and the changed face of her lover, Susan turned and beheld her sister. With the impulse of the pierced and loving heart, which divined all the agony inflicted, she sprang to Lucretia's side — she fell to the ground, and clasped her knees.

"Do not heed — do not believe him: it is but the frenzy of a moment. He spoke but to deceive me — *me*, who loved him once! Mine alone — mine is the crime. He knows all your worth; pity — pity — pity on yourself, on him — on me!"

Lucretia's eyes fell with the glare of a fiend upon the imploring face lifted to her own. Her lips moved, but no sound was audible. At length she drew herself from her sister's clasp, and walked steadily up to Mainwaring. She surveyed him with a calm and cruel gaze, as if she enjoyed his shame and terror. Before, however, she spoke, Mrs. Fielden, who had watched, as one spell-bound, Lucretia's movements, and without hearing what had passed, had the full foreboding of what would ensue, but had not stirred till Lucretia herself terminated the suspense, and broke the charm of her awe, — before she spoke, Mrs. Fielden rushed in, and giving vent to her agitation in loud sobs, as she threw her arms round Susan, who was still kneeling on the floor, brought something of grotesque to the more tragic and fearful character of the scene.

"My uncle was right; there is neither courage nor honour in the base-born! He, the schemer, too, is right. All hollow — all false!" Thus, said Lucretia, with a strange sort of musing accent, at first scornful, at last only quietly abstracted. "Rise,

Sir," she then added, with her most imperious tone; "do you not hear your Susan weep? do you fear in my presence to console her? Coward to her, as forsworn to me. Go, Sir, you are free!"

"Hear me," faltered Mainwaring, attempting to seize her hand; "I do not ask you to forgive; but —"

"Forgive, Sir!" interrupted Lucretia, rearing her head, and with a look of freezing and unspeakable majesty, "there is only one person here who needs a pardon; but her fault is inexpiable: it is the woman who stooped beneath her! — "

With these words, hurled from her with a scorn which crushed, while it galled, she mechanically drew round her form her black mantle; her eye glanced on the deep mourning of the garment, and her memory recalled all that that love had cost her; but she added no other reproach. Slowly she turned away: Passing Susan, who lay senseless in Mrs. Fielden's arms, she paused, and kissed her forehead.

"When she recovers, Madam," she said. to Mrs. Fielden, who was moved and astonished by this softness, "say, that Lucretia Clavering uttered a vow, when she kissed the brow of William Mainwaring's future wife!"

Olivier Dalibard was still seated in the parlour below when Lucretia entered. Her face yet retained its almost unearthly rigidity and calm; but a sort of darkness had come over its ashen pallor — that shade so indescribable which is seen in the human face, after long illness, a day or two before death. Dalibard was appalled, for he had too often seen that hue in the dying, not to recognise it now. His emotion was sufficiently genuine to give more than usual earnestness to his voice and gesture, as he poured out every word that spoke sympathy and soothing. For a long time Lucretia did not seem to hear him: at last her face softened — the ice broke.

"Motherless — friendless — lone — alone for ever — undone — undone!" she murmured. Her head sunk upon the shoulder of her fearful counsellor, unconscious of its resting-place, and she burst into tears — tears which, perhaps, saved her reason or her life.

CHAPTER IX.

A SOUL WITHOUT HOPE.

When Mr. Fielden returned home, Lucretia had quitted the house. She left a line for him in her usual bold, clear handwriting, referring him to his wife for explanation of the reasons that forbade a further residence beneath his roof. She had removed to an hotel, until she had leisure to arrange her plans for the future. In a few months, she should be of age; and in the meanwhile, who now living claimed authority over her? For the rest, she added — "I repeat what I told Mr. Mainwaring, all engagement between us is at an end — he will not insult me either by letter or by visit. It is natural that I should at present shrink from seeing Susan Mivers. Hereafter, if permitted, I will visit Mrs. Mainwaring."

Though all had chanced as Mr. Fielden had desired (if, as he once half meditated, he had spoken to Lucretia herself) — though a marriage that could have brought happiness to none, and would have made the misery of two, was at an end, he yet felt a bitter pang, almost of remorse, when he learned what had occurred. And Lucretia, before secretly disliked (if any one he could dislike), became dear to him at once, by sorrow and compassion. Forgetting every person, he hurried to the hotel Lucretia had chosen, but her coldness deceived and her pride repelled him. She listened drily to all he said, and merely replied — "I feel only gratitude at my escape. Let this subject now close for ever."

Mr. Fielden left her presence with less anxious and commiserating feelings — perhaps all had chanced for the best. And,

on returning home, his whole mind became absorbed in alarm for Susan. She was delirious and in great danger — it was many weeks before she recovered. Meanwhile, Lucretia had removed into private apartments, of which she withheld the address. During this time, therefore, they lost sight of her.

If, amidst the punishments with which the sombre imagination of poets has diversified the Realm of the tortured Shadows, it had depicted some soul condemned to look evermore down into an abyss — all change to its gaze forbidden — chasm upon chasm, yawning deeper and deeper, darker and darker, endless and infinite — so that, eternally gazing, the soul became, as it were, a part of the abyss, such an image would symbol forth the state of Lucretia's mind.

It was not the mere desolation of one whom love has abandoned and betrayed. In the abyss, were mingled inextricably together, the gloom of the past and of the future — there, the broken fortunes, the crushed ambition, the ruin of the worldly expectations long inseparable from her schemes; and amidst them, the angry shade of the more than father, whose heart she had wrung, whose old age she had speeded to the grave. These sacrifices to love, while love was left to her, might have haunted her at moments, but a smile, a word, a glance, banished the regret and the remorse. Now, love being rased out of life, the ruins of all else loomed dismal amidst the darkness; and a voice rose up, whispering, "Lo, Fool! what thou hast lost because thou didst believe and love!" And this thought grasped together the two worlds of being — the what has been, and the what shall be. All hope seemed stricken from the future as a man strikes from the calculations of his income the returns from a property irrevocably lost. At her age, but few of her sex have parted with religion, but even such mechanical faith as the lessons of her childhood, and the constrained conformities with Christian ceremonies had instilled, had long since melted away in the hard

scholastic scepticism of her fatal tutor — a scepticism which had won, with tittle effort, a reason delighting in the maze of doubt, and easily narrowed into the cramped and iron logic of disbelief, by an intellect that scorned to submit where it failed to comprehend. Nor had faith given place to those large moral truths from which philosophy has sought to restore the proud statue of pagan Virtue as a substitute for the meek symbol of the Christian cross. By temperament unsocial — nor readily moved to the genial and benevolent — that absolute egotism in which Olivier Dalibard centered his dreary ethics, seemed sanctioned to Lucretia by her studies into the motives of man and the history of the world. She had read the chronicles of states and the memoirs of statesmen, and seen how craft carries on the movements of an age. Those Viscontis, Castruccios, and Medici — those Richelieus, and Mazarins, and de Retzs — those Loyolas, and Mahomets, and Cromwells — those Monks and Godolphins — those Marlboroughs and Walpoles — those founders of history, and dynasties, and sects — those leaders and dupers of men, greater or lesser, corrupters or corrupt — all standing out prominent and renowned from the guiltless and laurelless obscure — seemed to win, by the homage of posterity, the rewards that attend the deceivers of their time. By a superb arrogance of generalization, she transferred into private life, and the rule of commonplace actions, the policy that, to the abasement of honour, has so often triumphed in the guidance of states. Therefore, betimes, the whole frame of society was changed to her eye, from the calm aspect it wears to those who live united with their kind — she viewed all seemings with suspicion; and before she had entered the world, prepared to live in it as a conspirator in a city convulsed, spying and espied, schemed against and scheming — here the crown for the crafty, there the axe for the outwitted.

But her love, for love is trust, had led her half way forth from this maze of the intellect. That fair youth of inexperience and

candour, which seemed to bloom out in the face of her betrothed — his very shrinking from the schemes so natural to her, that to her they seemed even innocent — his apparent reliance on mere masculine ability, with the plain aids of perseverance and honesty — all had an attraction that plucked her back from herself. If she clung to him, firmly, blindly, credulously, it was not as the lover alone. In the lover, she beheld the good angel. Had he only died to her — still the angel smile would have survived and warned. But the man had not died — the angel itself had deceived; — the wings could uphold her no more — they had touched the mire, and were sullied with the soil; — with the stain, was forfeited the strength. All was deceit and hollowness and treachery. Lone again in the universe, rose the eternal *I*. So down into the abyss she looked, depth upon depth, and the darkness had no relief, and the deep had no end.

Olivier Dalibard alone, of all she knew, was admitted to her seclusion. He played his part as might be expected from the singular patience and penetration which belonged to the genius of his character. He forbore the most distant allusion to his attachment or his hopes. He evinced sympathy rather, by imitating her silence, than attempts to console. When he spoke, he sought to interest her mind, more than to heal directly the deep wounds of her heart. There is always, to the afflicted, a certain charm in the depth and bitterness of eloquent misanthropy. And Dalibard, who professed not to be a man-hater, but a world-scorner, had powers of language and of reasoning commensurate with his astute intellect and his profound research. His society became not only a relief, it grew almost a want, to that stern sorrower. But, whether alarmed or not by the influence she felt him gradually acquiring, or whether, through some haughty desire to rise once more aloft from the state of her rival and her lover, she made one sudden effort to grasp at the rank

from which she had been hurled. The only living person, whose connexion could re-open to her the great world, with its splendours and its scope to ambition, was Charles Vernon. She scarcely admitted to her own mind the idea that she would now accept, if offered, the suit she had before despised — she did not even contemplate the renewal of that suit — though there was something in the gallant and disinterested character of Vernon which should have made her believe he would regard their altered fortunes rather as a claim on his honour than a release to his engagements. But hitherto no communication had passed between them, and this was strange if he retained the same intentions which he had announced at Laughton. Putting aside, we say, however, all such considerations, Vernon had sought her friendship, called her "cousin," enforced the distant relationship between them. Not as lover, but as kinsman, the only kinsman of her own rank she possessed — his position in the world, his connexions, his brilliant range of acquaintance, made his counsel for her future plans, his aid in the re-establishment of her consequence, (if not as wealthy, still as well born,) and her admission amongst her equals, of price and value. It was worth sounding-the depth of the friendship he had offered, even if his love had passed away with the fortune on which doubtless it had been based.

She took a bold step — she wrote to Vernon — not even to allude to what had passed between them: her pride forbade such unwomanly vulgarity. The baseness that was in her, took at least a more delicate exterior. She wrote to him simply and distantly, to state that there were some books and trifles of hers left at Laughton, which she prized beyond their trivial value; and to request, as she believed him to be absent from the hall, permission to take her old home, in her way to a visit in a neighbouring county, and point out to whomsoever he might appoint to meet her, the effects she deemed herself privileged to claim.

The letter was one merely of business, but it was a sufficient test of the friendly feelings of her former suitor.

She sent this letter to Vernon's house in London, and the next day came the answer.

Vernon, we must own, entirely sympathized with Sir Miles, in the solemn injunctions the old man had bequeathed. Immediately after the death of one to whom we owe gratitude and love, all his desires take a sanctity irresistible and ineffable. We adopt his affection, his dislikes, his obligations and his wrongs. And after he had read the copy of Lucretia's letter, enclosed to him by Sir Miles, the conquest the poor baronet had made over resentment and vindictive emotion, the evident effort at passionless justice with which he had provided becomingly for his niece, while he cancelled her claims as his heiress, had filled Vernon with a reverence for his wishes and decisions, that silenced all those inclinations to over-generosity which an unexpected inheritance is apt to create towards the less fortunate expectants; nevertheless, Lucretia's direct application, her formal appeal to his common courtesy as host and kinsman, perplexed greatly a man ever accustomed to a certain chivalry towards the sex; the usual frankness of his disposition suggested, however, plain dealing as the best escape from his dilemma, and therefore he answered thus:

"MADAM, — Under other circumstances it would have given me no common pleasure to place the house, that you so long inhabited, again at your disposal. And I feel so painfully the position which my refusal of your request inflicts upon me, that rather than resort to excuses and pretexts, which, while conveying an impression of my sincerity, would seem almost like an insult to yourself, I venture frankly to inform you, that it was the dying wish of my lamented kinsman, in consequence of a letter which came under his eye, that the welcome you had

hitherto received at Laughton should be withdrawn. Pardon me, Madam, if I express myself thus bluntly — it is somewhat necessary to the vindication of my character in your eyes, both as regards the honour of your request and my tacit resignation of hopes, fervently, but too presumptuously, entertained. In this most painful candour, Heaven forbid that I should add wantonly to your self-reproaches for the fault of youth and inexperience, which I should be the last person to judge rigidly, and which, had Sir Miles's life been spared, you would doubtless have amply repaired. The feelings which actuated Sir Miles in his latter days might have changed; but the injunction those feelings prompted I am bound to respect.

"For the mere matter of business, on which you have done me the honour to address me, I have only to say, that any orders you may give to the steward, or transmit through any person you may send to the hall, with regard to the effects you so naturally desire to claim, shall be implicitly obeyed.

"And believe me, Madam, (though I do not presume to add those expressions, which might rather heighten the offence I fear this letter will give you,) that the assurance of your happiness in the choice you have made, and which now no obstacle can oppose, will considerably lighten the pain with which I shall long recall my ungracious reply to your communication.

"I have the honour to be, &c. &c.

"C. Vernon St. John.

"Brook-street, Dec. 28, 18—."

The receipt of such a letter could hardly add to the profounder grief which preyed in the innermost core of Lucretia's heart, but in repelling the effort she had made to distract that grief by ambition, it blackened the sullen despondency with which she regarded the future. As the insect in the hollow snare of the ant-lion, she felt that there was no footing up the sides of the cave

into which she had fallen — the sand gave way to the step. But despondency in her, brought no meekness — the cloud did not descend in rain; — resting over the horizon, its darkness was tinged with the fires which it fed. The heart, already so embittered, was stung and mortified into intolerable shame and wrath. From the home that should have been hers, in which, as acknowledged heiress, she had smiled down on the ruined Vernon, she was banished by him who had supplanted her, as one worthless and polluted. Though, from motives of obvious delicacy, Vernon had not said expressly that he had seen the letter to Mainwaring, the unfamiliar and formal tone which he assumed, indirectly declared it, and betrayed the impression it had made, in spite of his reserve. A living man then was in possession of a secret which justified his disdain, and that man was master of Laughton! The suppressed rage which embraced the lost lover, extended darkly over this witness to that baffled and miserable love. But what availed rage against either? Abandoned and despoiled, she was powerless to avenge. It was at this time, when her prospects seemed most dark, her pride was most crushed, and her despair of the future at its height, that she turned to Dalibard as the only friend left to her under the sun. Even the vices she perceived in him became merits, for they forbade him to despise her. And now, this man rose suddenly into another and higher aspect of character: of late, though equally deferential to her, there had been something more lofty in his mien, more assured on his brow; gleams of a secret satisfaction, even of a joy, that he appeared anxious to suppress, as ill in harmony with her causes for dejection, broke out in his looks and words. At length, one day, after some preparatory hesitation, he informed her that he was free to return to France — that even without the peace between England and France, which, (known under the name of the Peace of Amiens,) had been just concluded, he should have crossed the channel. The advocacy

and interest of friends, whom he had left at Paris, had already brought him under the special notice of the wonderful man who then governed France, and who sought to unite in its service every description and variety of intellect. He should return to France, and then — why, then, the ladder was on the walls of Fortune and the foot planted on the step! As he spoke, confidently and sanguinely, with the nerve and assurance of an able man who sees clear the path to his goal, as he sketched with rapid precision the nature of his prospects and his hopes, all that subtle wisdom which had before often seemed but vague and general, took practical shape and interest, thus applied to the actual circumstances of men; the spirit of intrigue, which seemed mean when employed on mean things, swelled into statesmanship and masterly genius to the listener, when she saw it linked with the large objects of masculine ambition. Insensibly, therefore, her attention became earnest — her mind aroused. The vision of a field, afar from the scenes of her humiliation and despair — a field for energy, stratagem, and contest — invited her restless intelligence. As Dalibard had profoundly calculated, there was no new channel for her affections — the source was dried up, and the parched sands heaped over it; but while the heart lay dormant, the mind rose, sleepless, chafed, and perturbed. Through the mind, he indirectly addressed and subtly wooed her.

"Such" — he said, as he rose to take leave — "such is the career, to which I could depart with joy if I did not depart alone!"

"Alone!" that word, more than once that day, Lucretia repeated to herself — "alone!" — and what career was left to her — she, *too*, alone!

In certain stages of great grief, our natures yearn for excitement. This has made some men gamblers; it has made even women drunkards — it had effect over the serene calm, and

would-be divinity of the Poet-sage. When his son dies, Goethe does not mourn — he plunges into the absorption of a study, uncultivated before. But, in the great contest of life, in the whirlpool of actual affairs, the stricken heart finds all — the gambling, the inebriation, and the study.

We pause here. We have pursued long enough that patient analysis, with all the food for reflection that it possibly affords, to which we were insensibly led on by an interest, dark and fascinating, that grew more and more upon us, as we proceeded in our research into the early history of a person fated to pervert no ordinary powers into no commonplace guilt.

The charm is concluded — the circle closed round — the self-guided seeker after knowledge has gained the fiend for the familiar.

CHAPTER X.

THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN FATHER AND SON.

We pass over an interval of some months.

A painter stood at work at the easel; his human model before him. He was employed on a nymph — the Nymph Galatea. The subject had been taken before by Salvator, whose genius found all its elements in the wild rocks, gnarled fantastic trees, and gushing waterfalls of the landscape — in the huge ugliness of Polyphemus the lover — in the grace and suavity and unconscious abandonment of the nymph, sleeking her tresses dripping from the bath. The painter, on a larger canvas (for Salvator's picture, at least, the one we have seen, is among the small sketches of the great artistic creator of the romantic and grotesque), had transferred the subject of the master; but he had left subordinate the landscape and the giant, to concentrate all his art on the person of the Nymph. Middle-aged was the painter, in truth; but he looked old. His hair, though long, was gray and thin; his face was bloated by intemperance; and his hand trembled much, though from habit no trace of the tremor was visible in his work.

A boy, near at hand, was also employed on the same subject, with a rough chalk and a bold freedom of touch. He was sketching *his* design of a Galatea and Polyphemus on the wall: for the wall was only whitewashed, and covered already with the multiform vagaries whether of master or pupils; caricatures and demigods, hands and feet, torsos and monsters, and Venuses — the rude creations, all mutilated, jarring, and mingled, gave a cynical, mocking, devil-may-care kind of aspect to the sanctum

of art. It was like the dissection-room of the anatomist. The boy's sketch was more in harmony with the walls of the studio than the canvas of the master. His nymph, accurately drawn from the undressed proportions of the Model down to the waist, terminated in the scales of a fish. The forked branches of the trees stretched weird and imp-like as the hands of skeletons. Polyphemus, peering over the rocks, had the leer of a demon; and in his gross features there was a certain distorted, hideous likeness of the grave and symmetrical lineaments of Olivier Dalibard.

All around was slovenly, squalid, and poverty-stricken; rickety, worn-out, rush-bottom chairs; unsold, unfinished, pictures, pell-mell in the corner, covered with dust; broken casts of plaster; a lay-figure battered in its basket-work arms, with its doll-like face, all smudged and besmeared: a pot of porter and a noggin of gin on a stained deal table, accompanied by two or three broken, smoke-blackened pipes, some tattered song-books, and old numbers of the Covent-garden Magazine, betrayed the tastes of the artist, and accounted for the shaking hand and the bloated form. A jovial, disorderly, vagrant dog of a painter, was Tom Varney! —. a bachelor, of course — humorous and droll — a boon companion, and a terrible borrower: clever enough in his calling; with pains and some method, he had easily gained subsistence and established a name; but he had one trick that soon ruined him in the business-part of his profession. He took a fourth of his price in advance; and having once clutched the money, the poor customer might go hang for his picture! The only things Tom Varney ever fairly completed were those for which no order had been given; for in them, somehow or other, his fancy became interested, and on them he lavished the gusto which he really possessed. But the subjects were rarely saleable. Nymphs and deities undraperied, have few worshippers in England amongst the buyers of "furni-

ture pictures." And, to say truth, nymph and deity had usually a very equivocal look; and if they came from the gods, you would swear it was the gods of the galleries of Drury. His most profitable performances were small paintings on ivory, which were caught at by jewellers, and sold, in snuff boxes, to elderly gentlemen. When Tom Varney sold a picture, he lived upon clover till the money was gone. Gay time for his models; for he had the weakness, unbecoming an artist, to fall in love with his Fornarinas; and as he had not the personal graces of Raffaelle, the Fornarinas were expensive *bonnes fortunes*. But the poorer and less steady alumni of the rising school, especially those at war with the Academy from which Varney was excluded, pitied, despised, yet liked and courted him withal. In addition to his good qualities of blithe song-singer, droll story-teller, and stanch Bacchanalian, Tom Varney was liberally good-natured in communicating instruction really valuable to those who knew how to avail themselves of a knowledge he had made almost worthless to himself. He was a shrewd, though good-natured critic, had many little secrets of colouring and composition, which an invitation to supper, or the loan of ten shillings, was sufficient to bribe from him. Ragged, out of elbows, unshaven, and slipshod, he still had his set, amongst the gay and the young — a precious master, a profitable set, for his nephew, Master Honoré Gabriel! But the poor rapscallion had a heart larger than many honest painstaking men. As soon as Gabriel had found him out, and entreated refuge from his fear of his father, the painter clasped him tight in his great slovenly arms, sold a Venus halfprice, to buy him a bed and a wash-stand, and swore a tremendous oath, "that the son of his poor guillotined sister should share the last shilling in his pocket — the last drop in his can."

Gabriel, fresh from the cheer of Laughton, and spoiled by the prodigal gifts of Lucretia, had little gratitude for shillings

and porter. Nevertheless, he condescended to take what he could get, while he sighed, from the depths of a heart in which cupidity and vanity had become the predominant rulers, for a destiny more worthy his genius, and more in keeping with the sphere from which he had descended.

The boy finished his sketch, with an impudent wink at the model, flung himself back on his chair, folded his arms, cast a discontented glance at the whitened seams of the sleeves, and soon seemed lost in his own reflections. The painter worked on in silence. The model, whom Gabriel's wink had aroused, half-flattered, half-indignant for a moment, lapsed into a doze. Outside the window, you heard the song of a canary — a dingy, smoke-coloured canary — that seemed shedding its plumes, for they were as ragged as the garments of its master; still it contrived to sing — trill-trill-trill-trill-trill, as blithely as if free in its native woods, or pampered by fair hands in a gilded cage. The bird was the only true artist there: it sang, as the poet sings, to obey its nature and vent its heart. Trill-trill-trillela-la-la-trill-trill, went the song — louder, gayer than usual — for there was a gleam of April sunshine, struggling over the roof-tops. The song at length roused up Gabriel; he turned his chair round, laid his head on one side, listened, and looked curiously at the bird.

At length, an idea seemed to cross him: he rose, opened the window, drew in the cage, placed it on the chair, then took up one of his uncle's pipes, walked to the fire-place, and thrust the shank of the pipe into the bars. When it was red-hot, he took it out by the bowl, having first protected his hand from the heat by wrapping round it his handkerchief; this done, he returned to the cage. His movements had wakened up the dozing model. She eyed them at first with dull curiosity, then with lively suspicion; and presently starting up with an exclamation, such as no novelist but Fielding dare put into the mouth of a

female — much less a nymph of such renown as Galatea — she sprang across the room, well-nigh upsetting easel and painter, and fastened firm hold on Gabriel's shoulders.

"The varment!" she cried, vehemently; "the good-for-nothing varment! If it had been a jay, or a nasty raven, well and good! — but a poor little canary!"

"Hoity-toity! what are you about, nephew? What 's the matter?" said Tom Varney, coming up to the strife. And, indeed, it was time, for Gabriel's teeth were set in his cat-like jaws, and with his weapon, equally fearful and simple, raised menacingly in the hand which he had wrested from the grasp of the model, he seemed only pausing to consider to what part of that delicate form he should most effectually direct the still glowing point of the pipe-shank.

"What 's the matter?" replied Gabriel, sullenly; "why, I was only going to try a little experiment."

"An experiment? not on my canary, poor, dear little thing! — the hours and hours that creature has strained its throat to say — 'sing and be merry,' when I had not a rap in my pocket! It would have made a stone feel to hear it."

"But I think I can make it sing much better than ever — only just let me try! They say, that if you put out the eyes of a canary, it —" Gabriel was not allowed to conclude his sentence; for here rose that clamour of horror and indignation, from both painter and model, which usually greets the announcement of every philosophical discovery — at least, when about to be practically applied; and in the midst of the hubbub, the poor little canary, who had been fluttering about the cage to escape the hand of the benevolent operator, set up no longer the cheerful trill — trillelala-trill, but a scared and heart-breaking chirp — a shrill, terrified twit-twit-twitter-twit.

"Damn the bird! — hold your tongues!" cried Gabriel Varney, reluctantly giving way; but still eyeing the bird with the

scientific regret with which the illustrious Majendie might contemplate a dog which some brute of a master refused to disembowel for the good of the colics of mankind.

The model seized on the cage, shut the door of the wires, and carried it off. Tom Varney drained the rest of his porter, and wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his coat.

"And to use my pipe for such cruelty! Boy, boy, I could not have believed it! But you were not in earnest — oh, no, impossible! Sukey, my love — Galatea, the divine — calm thy breast.

"'Lull to sleep those snowy billows!'

Cupid did but jest:

"'Cupid is the God of Laughter,
Quip, and jest, and joke, Sir.'"

"If you don't whip the little wretch within an inch of his life, he 'll have a gallows end on 't," replied Galatea.

"Go, Cupid, go and kiss Galatea, and make your peace:

"'Oh, leave a kiss within the cup,
And I 'll not ask for wine!'

And it 's no use asking for wine, or for gin either — not a drop in the noggin!"

All this while, Gabriel, disdaining the recommendations held forth to him, was employed in brushing his jacket with a very mangy-looking brush; and when he had completed that operation, he approached his uncle, and coolly thrust his hands into that gentleman's waistcoat-pockets.

"Uncle, what have you done with those seven shillings? I am going out to spend the day."

"If you give them to him, Tom, I 'll scratch your eyes out," cried the model; "and then we 'll see how *you 'll* sing. Whip him, I say — whip him!"

But, strange to say, this liberty of the boy's quite re-opened the heart of his uncle — it was a pleasure to him, who put his hand so habitually into other people's pockets, to be invested with the novel grandeur of the man sponged upon. "That 's right, Cupid, son of Cytherea; all 's common property amongst friends. Seven shillings, I have 'em not! 'They now are five who once were seven;' but such as they are, we 'll share!

'Let old Timotheus yield the prize,
Or both divide the crown.' "

"Crowns bear no division, my uncle," said Gabriel, drily — and he pocketed the five shillings. Then, having first secured his escape, by gaining the threshold, he suddenly seized one of the rickety chairs by its leg, and regardless of the gallantries due to the sex, sent it right against the model, who was shaking her fist at him. A scream, and a fall, and a sharp twit from the cage, which was hurled nearly into the fire-place, told that the missive had taken effect. Gabriel did not wait for the probable re-action; he was in the streets in an instant.

"This won't do," he muttered to himself; "there is no getting on here. Foolish, drunken vagabond! no good to be got from him. My father is terrible, but he will make his way in the world. Umph! if I were but his match — and why not? I am brave, and he is not. There 's fun, too, in danger."

Thus musing, he took his way to Dalibard's lodgings. His father was at home. Now, though they were but lodgings, and the street not in fashion, Olivier Dalibard's apartments had an air of refinement, and even elegance, that contrasted both the wretched squalor of the abode Gabriel had just left, and the meanness of Dalibard's former quarters in London. The change seemed to imply that the Provençal had already made some way in the world. And, truth to say, at all times, even in the lowest ebb of his fortunes, there was that indescribable neatness and

formality of precision about all the exterior seemings of the *ci-devant* friend of the prim Robespierre which belong to those in whom order and method are strongly developed—qualities which give even to neediness a certain dignity. As the room and its owner met the eye of Gabriel, on whose senses all externals had considerable influence, the ungrateful young ruffian recalled the kind, tattered slovenly uncle, whose purse he had just emptied, without one feeling milder than disgust. Olivier Dalibard, always careful, if simple, in his dress, with his brow of grave intellectual power, and his mien imposing, not only from its calm, but from that nameless refinement which rarely fails to give to the student the air of a gentleman — Olivier Dalibard he might dread — he might even detest; but he was not ashamed of him.

"I said I would visit you, Sir, if you would permit me," said Gabriel, in a tone of respect, not unmingled with some defiance, as if in doubt of his reception.

The father's slow, full eye, so different from the sidelong furtive glance of Lucretia, rested on the son, as if to penetrate his very heart.

"You look pale and haggard, child: you are fast losing your health and beauty. Good gifts these, not to be wasted before they can be duly employed. But you have taken your choice. 'Be an artist — copy Tom Varney, and prosper."

Gabriel remained silent, with his eyes on the floor.

"You come in time for my farewell," resumed Dalibard. "It is a comfort, at least, that I leave your youth so honourably protected. I am about to return to my country — my career is once more before me!"

"Your country — to Paris?"

"There are fine pictures in the Louvre — a good place to inspire an artist!"

"You go alone, father!"

"You forget, young gentleman, you disown me as father!

Go alone! I thought I told you in the times of our confidence, that I should marry Lucretia Clavering. I rarely fail in my plans. She has lost Laughton, it is true, but ten thousand pounds will make a fair commencement to fortune, even at Paris. Well, what do you want with me, worthy godson of Honoré Gabriel Mirabeau?"

"Sir, if you will let me, I will go with you."

Dalibard shaded his brow with his hand, and reflected on the filial proposal. On the one hand, it might be convenient, and would certainly be economical to rid himself evermore of the mutinous son who had already thrown off his authority; on the other hand, there was much in Gabriel, mutinous and even menacing as he had lately become, that promised an unscrupulous tool or a sharp-witted accomplice, with interests that every year the ready youth would more and more discover were bound up in his plotting father's. This last consideration, joined, if not to affection, still to habit — to the link between blood and blood, which even the hardest find it difficult to sever, prevailed. He extended to Gabriel the pale, delicate, clear-veined hand, which Lawrence (had he seen) would have longed to copy for a cardinal's, and said, gently —

"I will take you, if we rightly understand each other. Once again in my power, I might constrain you to my will, it is true. But I rather confer with you as man to man than as man to boy."

"It is the best way," said Gabriel, firmly.

"I will use no harshness — inflict no punishment, unless, indeed, amply merited by stubborn disobedience or wilful deceit. But if I meet with these, better rot on a dunghill than come with me! I ask implicit confidence in all my suggestions, prompt submission to all my requests. Grant me but these, and I promise to consult your fortune as my own — to gratify your tastes as far as my means will allow — to grudge not your pleasures; and, when the age for ambition comes, to aid your rise if I rise my-

self; nay, if well contented with you, to remove the blot from your birth, by acknowledging and adopting you formally as my son."

"Agreed! and I thank you," said Gabriel. "And Lucretia is going, oh, I so long to see her!"

"See her — not yet; but next week."

"Do not fear that I should let out about the letter. I should betray myself, if I did," said the boy, bluntly betraying his guess at his father's delay.

The evil scholar smiled.

"You will do well to keep it secret for your own sake; for mine, I should not fear. Gabriel, go back now to your master — you do right, like the rats, to run from the falling house. Next week, I will send for you, Gabriel!"

Not, however, back to the studio went the boy. He sauntered leisurely through the gayest streets, eyed the shops, and the equipages, the fair women, and the well-dressed men — eyed with envy, and longings, and visions of pomps and vanities to come; then, when the day began to close, he sought out a young painter, the wildest and maddest of the crew to whom his uncle had presented their future comrade and rival, and went with this youth, at half-price, to the theatre, not to gaze on the actors or study the play, but to stroll in the saloon. A supper in the *Finish*, completed the void in his pockets, and concluded his day's rank experience of life. By the gray dawn he stole back to his bed, and as he laid himself down, he thought with avid pleasure of Paris, its gay gardens, and brilliant shops, and crowded streets; he thought, too, of his father's calm confidence of success, of the triumph that already had attended his wiles — a confidence and a triumph which exciting his reverence and rousing his emulation, had decided his resolution. He thought, too, o Lucretia, with something of affection, recalled her praises and bribes, her frequent mediation with his father, and felt that they

should have need of each other. Oh, no, he never would tell her of the snare laid at Guy's Oak — never, not even if incensed with his father! An instinct told him that that offence could never be forgiven, and that, henceforth, Lucretia's was a destiny bound up in his own. He thought, too, of Dalibard's warning and threat. But, with fear itself came a strange excitement of pleasure — to grapple, if necessary, he a mere child, with such a man! — his heart swelled at the thought. So, at last he fell asleep, and dreamed that he saw his mother's trunkless face dripping gore, and frowning on him — dreamed that he heard her say — "Goest thou to the scene of my execution only to fawn upon my murderer?" Then a night-mare of horrors, of scaffolds, and executioners, and grinning mobs, and agonized faces, came on him — dark, confused, and indistinct. And he woke, with his hair standing on end, and heard below, in the rising sun, the merry song of the poor canary — trill-lill-lill, trill-trill-lill-lill-la! Did he feel glad that his cruel hand had been stayed?

EPILOGUE TO PART THE FIRST.

It is a year since the November day on which Lucretia Clavering quitted the roof of Mr. Fielden. And first we must recall the eye of the reader to the old-fashioned terrace at Laughton; the jutting porch, the quaint balustrades, the broad, dark, changeless cedars on the lawn beyond. The day is calm, clear and mild, for November in the country is often a gentle month. On that terrace walked Charles Vernon, now known by his new name of St. John. Is it the change of name that has so changed the person? Can the wand of the Herald's Office have filled up the hollows of the cheek, and replaced by elastic vigour, the listless languor of the tread? No; there is another and a better cause for that healthful change. Mr. Vernon St. John is not alone — a fair companion leans on his arm. See, she pauses to press closer to his side, gaze on his face, and whisper, "We did well to have hope and faith!"

The husband's faith had not been so unshaken as his Mary's, and a slight blush passed over his cheek as he thought of his concession to Sir Miles's wishes, and his overtures to Lucretia Clavering. Still that fault had been fairly acknowledged to his wife, and she felt, the moment she had spoken, that she had committed an indiscretion; nevertheless, with an arch touch of womanly malice, she added softly, —

"And Miss Clavering, you persist in saying, was not really handsome?"

"My love," replied the husband, gravely, "you would

oblige me by not recalling the very painful recollections connected with that name. Let it never be mentioned in this house."

Lady Mary bowed her graceful head in submission — she understood Charles's feelings. For though he had not shown her Sir Miles's letter and its enclosure, he had communicated enough to account for the unexpected heritage, and to lessen his wife's compassion for the disappointed heiress. Nevertheless, she comprehended that her husband felt an uneasy twinge at the idea that he was compelled to act hardly to the one whose hopes he had supplanted. Lucretia's banishment from Laughton was a just humiliation, but it humbled a generous heart to inflict the sentence. Thus, on all accounts, the remembrance of Lucretia was painful and unwelcome to the successor of Sir Miles. There was a silence — Lady Mary pressed her husband's hand.

"It is strange," said he, giving vent to his thoughts at that tender sign of sympathy in his feeling — "strange that, after all, she did not marry Mainwaring, but fixed her choice on that supple Frenchman. But she has settled abroad now, perhaps for life — a great relief to my mind. Yes, let us never recur to her."

"Fortunately," said Lady Mary, with some hesitation, "she does not seem to have created much interest here. The poor seldom name her to me, and our neighbours only with surprise at her marriage. In another year she will be forgotten!"

Mr. St. John sighed. Perhaps he felt how much more easily he had been forgotten, were he the banished one, Lucretia the possessor! His light nature, however, soon escaped from all thoughts and sources of annoyance, and he listened with complacent attention to Lady Mary's gentle plans for the poor, and the children's school, and the cottages that ought to be repaired, and the labourers that ought to be employed. For, though it may seem singular, Vernon St. John, insensibly influenced by

his wife's meek superiority, and corrected by her pure companionship, had begun to feel the charm of innocent occupations; — more, perhaps, than if he had been accustomed to the larger and loftier excitements of life, and missed that stir of intellect which is the element of those who have warred in the democracy of letters, or contended for the leadership of states. He had begun already to think that the country was no such exile after all. Naturally benevolent, he had taught himself to share the occupations his Mary had already found in the busy 'luxury of doing good,' and to conceive that brotherhood of charity which usually unites the lord of the village with its poor.

"I think, what with hunting once a-week, — (I will not venture more till my pain in the side is quite gone,) — and with the help of some old friends at Christmas, we can get through the winter very well, Mary."

"Ah, those old friends! I dread them more than the hunting!"

"But we 'll have your grave father, and your dear, precise, excellent mother, to keep us in order. And if I sit more than half an hour after dinner, the old butler shall pull me out by the ears. Mary, what do you say to thinning the grove yonder? We shall get a better view of the landscape beyond. No, hang it! dear old Sir Miles loved his trees better than the prospect — I won't lop a bough. But that avenue we are planting will be certainly a noble improvement —"

"Fifty years hence, Charles!"

"It is our duty to think of posterity," answered the *ci-devant* spendthrift, with a gravity that was actually pompous. "But hark? is that two o'clock? Three, by Jove! How time flies! and my new bullocks that I was to see at two! Come down to the farm, that 's my own Mary. Ah, your fine ladies are not such bad housewives after all!"

"And your fine gentlemen —"

"Capital farmers! I had no idea till last week that a prize ox was so interesting an animal. One lives to learn. Put me in mind, by-the-bye, to write to Coke about his sheep."

"This way, dear Charles; we can go round by the village, and see poor Ponto and Dash."

The tears rushed to Mr. St. John's eyes. "If poor Sir Miles could have known you!" he said, with a sigh; and, though the gardeners were at work on the lawn, he bowed his head, and kissed the blushing cheek of his wife as heartily as if he had been really a farmer.

From the terrace at Laughton, turn to the humbler abode of our old friend the Vicar — the same day, the same hour. Here also the scene is without doors — we are in the garden of the vicarage; the children are playing at hide and seek amongst the espaliers, which screen the winding gravel walks from the esculents more dear to Ceres than to Flora. The Vicar is seated in his little parlour, from which a glazed door admits into the garden. The door is now open, and the good man has paused from his work (he had just discovered a new emendation in the first chorus of the *Medea*,) to look out at the rosy faces that gleam to and fro across the scene. His wife, with a basket in her hand, is standing without the door, but a little aside, not to obstruct the view.

"It does one's heart good to see them!" said the vicar; "little dears!"

"Yes, they ought to be dear at this time of the year," observed Mrs. Fielden, who was absorbed in the contents of the basket.

"And so fresh!"

"Fresh, indeed! — how different from London! In London they were not fit to be seen; as old as — I am sure I can't guess how old they were. But you see here they are new laid every morning!"

"My dear!" said Mr. Fielden, opening his eyes — "new laid every morning!"

"Two dozen and four."

"Two dozen and four! — What on earth are you talking about, Mrs. Fielden?"

"Why the eggs to be sure, my love!"

"Oh!" said the Vicar, "two dozen and four! — you alarmed me a little; 't is of no consequence — only my foolish mistake. Always prudent and saving, my dear Sarah; just as if poor Sir Miles had not left us that munificent fortune, I may call it."

"It will not go very far when we have our young ones to settle. And — David is very extravagant already: he has torn such a hole in his jacket!"

At this moment, up the gravel walk, two young persons came in sight. The children darted across them, whooping and laughing, and vanished in the further recess of the garden.

"All is for the best — blind mortals that we are! — all is for the best!" said the Vicar, musingly, as his eyes rested upon the approaching pair.

"Certainly, my love; you are always right, and it is wicked to grumble. *Still*, if you saw what a hole it was — past patching, I fear!"

"Look round!" said Mr. Fielden, benevolently. "How we grieved for them both; how wroth we were with William — how sad for Susan! And now see them — they will be the better man and wife for their trial!"

"Has Susan then consented? I was almost afraid she never would consent. How often have I been almost angry with her, poor lamb! when I have heard her accuse herself of causing her sister's unhappiness, and declare with sobs that she felt it a crime to think of William Mainwaring as a husband."

"I trust I have reasoned her out of a morbid sensibility, which, while it could not have rendered Lucretia the happier, must have

ensured the wretchedness of herself and William. But if Lucretia had not married, and so for ever closed the door on William's repentance, (that is, supposing he *did* repent,) I believe poor Susan would rather have died of a broken heart, than have given her hand to Mainwaring."

"It was an odd marriage of that proud young lady's, after all," said Mrs. Fielden; "so much older than her — a foreigner, too!"

"But he is a very pleasant man, and they had known each other so long. I did not, however, quite like a sort of cunning he showed, when I came to reflect on it, in bringing Lucretia back to the house; it looks as if he had laid a trap for her from the first."

"Ten thousand pounds! — a great catch for a foreigner!" observed Mrs. Fielden, with the *naïve* instinct of her sex; and then she added, in the spirit of a prudent sympathy equally characteristic: "But I think you say Mr. Parchmount persuaded her to allow half to be settled on herself. That will be a hold on him."

"A bad hold, if that be all, Sarah. There is a better — he is a learned man, and a scholar. Scholars are naturally domestic, and make good husbands."

"But you know he must be a papist!" said Mrs. Fielden.

"Umph!" muttered the Vicar, irresolutely.

While the worthy couple were thus conversing, Susan and her lover, not having finished their conference, had turned back through the winding walk.

"Indeed," said William, drawing her arm closer to his side, "these scruples — these fears — are cruel to me as well as to yourself. If you were no longer existing, I could be nothing to your sister. Nay, even were she not married, you must know enough of her pride to be assured that I can retain no place in her affections. What has chanced was not our crime. Perhaps

Heaven designed to save, not only us, but herself, from the certain misery of nuptials so inauspicious!"

"If she would but answer one of my letters!" sighed Susan; "or if I could but know that she were happy and contented!"

"Your letters must have miscarried — you are not sure even of her address. Rely upon it she is happy. Do you think that she would, a second time 'have stooped beneath her'"—Mainwaring's lip writhed as he repeated that phrase — "if her feelings had not been involved? I would not wrong your sister — I shall ever feel gratitude for the past, and remorse for my own shameful weakness — still I must think that the nature of her attachment to me, was more ardent than lasting."

"Ah, William! how can you know her heart?"

"By comparing it with yours. Oh, there, indeed, I may anchor my faith! Susan, we were formed for each other! Our natures are alike — save that yours, despite its surpassing sweetness, has greater strength in its simple candour. You will be my guide to good. Without you I should have no aim in life — no courage to front the contests of this world. Ah, this hand trembles still!"

"William, William, I cannot repress a foreboding — a superstition! At night, I am haunted with that pale face, as I saw it last, — pale with suppressed despair. Oh, if ever Lucretia could have need of us — need of our services, our affections — if we could but repair the grief we have caused her!"

Susan's head sank on her lover's shoulder. She had said "need of *us*" — "need of *our* services." In those simple monosyllables the union was pledged — the identity of their lots in the dark urn was implied.

From this scene turn again — the slide shifts in the lantern — we are at Paris. In the ante-chamber at the Tuilleries, a crowd of expectant courtiers and adventurers gaze upon a figure who

passes with modest and downcast eyes through the throng; he has just left the closet of the First Consul.

"*Par Dieu*!" said B —, "power, like misery, makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows. I should like to hear what the First Consul can have to say to Olivier Dalibard."

Fouché, who at that period was scheming for the return to his old dignities as minister of police, smiled slightly, and answered, "In a time when the air is filled with daggers, one who was familiar with Robespierre has his uses. Olivier Dalibard is a remarkable man. He is one of those children of the Revolution, whom that great mother is bound to save."

"By betraying his brethren?" said B —, drily.

"I do not allow the inference. The simple fact is that Dalibard has spent many years in England — he has married an Englishwoman of birth and connexions — he knows well the English language and English people — and just now, when the First Consul is so anxious to *approfondir* the popular feelings of that strange nation, with whose government he is compelled to go to war, he may naturally have much to say to so acute an observer as Olivier Dalibard."

"Um!" said B —; "with such patronage, Robespierre's friend should hold his head somewhat higher!"

Meanwhile, Olivier Dalibard, crossing the gardens of the palace, took his way to the Faubourg St. Germain. There was no change in the aspect of this man; the same meditative tranquillity characterized his downward eyes and bended brow; the same precise simplicity of dress which had pleased the prim taste of Robespierre, gave decorum to his slender stooping form. No expression more cheerful, no footstep more elastic, bespoke the exile's return to his native land, or the sanguine expectations of Intellect restored to a career. Yet, to all appearance, the prospects of Dalibard were bright and promising. The First Consul was at that stage of his greatness, when he sought to

employ in his service all such talent as the Revolution had made manifest — provided only, that it was not stained with notorious bloodshed, or too strongly associated with the Jacobin clubs. His quick eye seemed to have discovered already the abilities of Dalibard, and to have appreciated the sagacity and knowledge of men which had enabled this subtle person to obtain the friendship of Robespierre, without sharing in his crimes. He had been frequently closeted with Buonaparte; he was in the declared favour of Fouché, who, though not at that period at the head of the Police, was too necessary admist the dangers of the time, deepened as they were by the rumours of some terrible and profound conspiracy, to be laid aside, as the First Consul had at one moment designed. One man alone, of those high in the State, appeared to distrust Olivier Dalibard — the celebrated Cambacères. But with his aid the Provençal could dispense. What was the secret of Dalibard's power? was it, in truth, owing solely to his native talent, and his acquired experience, especially of England? — was it by honourable means that he had won the ear of the First Consul? We may be sure of the contrary; for it is a striking attribute of men once thoroughly tainted by the indulgence of vicious schemes and stratagems, that they become wholly blinded to those plain paths of ambition, which common sense makes manifest to ordinary ability. If we regard narrowly the lives of great criminals, we are often very much startled by the extraordinary acuteness — the profound calculation — the patient meditative energy which they have employed upon the conception and execution of a crime. We feel inclined to think that such intellectual power would have commanded great distinction, worthily used and guided; but we never find that these great criminals seem to have been sensible of the opportunities to real eminence which they have thrown away. Often we observe that here has been before them vistas into worldly greatness, which, by no uncommon prudence and exertion, would have conducted

honest men, half as clever, to fame and power; but, with a strange obliquity of vision, they appear to have looked from these broad clear avenues, into some dark, tangled defile, in which, by the subtlest ingenuity, and through the most besetting perils, they may attain at last to the success of a fraud, or the enjoyment of a vice. In crime once indulged, there is a wonderful fascination — and the fascination is, not rarely, great in proportion to the intellect of the criminal.—There is always hope of reform for a dull, uneducated, stolid man, led by accident or temptation into guilt; but where a man of great ability, and highly educated, besots himself in the intoxication of dark and terrible excitements, takes impure delight in tortuous and slimy ways, the good angel abandons him for ever.

Olivier Dalibard walked musingly on — gained a house in one of the most desolate quarters of the abandoned Faubourg, mounted the spacious stairs, and rang at the door of an attic next the roof. After some moments, the door was slowly and cautiously opened, and two small fierce eyes, peering through a mass of black tangled curls, gleamed through the aperture. The gaze seemed satisfactory.

"Enter, friend," said the inmate, with a sort of complacent grunt; and, as Dalibard obeyed, the man reclosed, and barred the door.

The room was bare to beggary, — the ceiling, low and sloping, was blackened with smoke. A wretched bed, two chairs, a table, a strong chest, a small cracked looking-glass, completed the inventory. The dress of the occupier was not in keeping with the chamber; — true that it was not such as was worn by the wealthier classes, but it betokened no sign of poverty. A blue coat, with high collar, and half of military fashion, was buttoned tight over a chest of vast girth; the nether garments were of leather, scrupulously clean, and solid, heavy riding boots came half way up the thigh. A more sturdy, stal-

wart, strong-built knave, never excited the admiration which physical power always has a right to command: And Dalibard gazed on him with envy. The pale scholar absolutely sighed as he thought — what an auxiliary to his own scheming mind would have been so tough a frame!

But even less in form than face did the man of thews and sinews contrast the man of wile and craft. Opposite that high forehead, with its massive development of organs, scowled the low front of one to whom thought was unfamiliar — protuberant, indeed, over the shaggy brows, where phrenologists place the seats of practical perception — strongly marked in some of the brutes, as in the dog — but almost literally void of those higher organs, by which we reason, and imagine, and construct. But in rich atonement for such deficiency, all the animal reigned triumphant in the immense mass and width of the skull behind. And as the hair, long before, curled in close rings to the nape of the bull-like neck, you saw before you one of those useful instruments to ambition and fraud, which recoil at no danger, comprehend no crime, are not without certain good qualities, under virtuous guidance, — for they have the fidelity, the obedience, the stubborn courage of the animal; but which, under evil control, turn those very qualities to unsparing evil — bull-dogs to rend the foe, as bull-dogs to defend the master.

For some moments the two men gazed silently at each other. At length, Dalibard said, with an air of calm superiority —

"My friend, it is time that I should be presented to the chiefs of your party!"

"Chiefs, *par tous les diables!*" growled the other; "we *Chouans* are all chiefs, when it comes to blows. You have seen my credentials; you know that I am a man to be trusted; what more do you need?"

"For myself nothing; but my friends are more scrupulous. I have sounded, as I promised, the heads of the old Jacobin

party — and they are favourable. This upstart soldier, who has suddenly seized in his iron grasp all the fruits of the Revolution, is as hateful to them as to you. But, *que voulez vous, mon cher*— men are men! It is one thing to destroy Buonaparte; it is another thing to restore the Bourbons. How can the Jacobin chiefs depend on your assurance, or my own, that the Bourbons will forget the old offences, and reward the new service. You apprise me, so do your credentials, that a Prince of the blood is engaged in this enterprise, that he will appear at the proper season. Put me in direct communication with this representative of the Bourbons, and I promise in return, if his assurances are satisfactory, that you shall have an *émeute* to be felt from Paris to Marseilles. If you cannot do this, I am useless; and I withdraw —"

"Withdraw! *Garde à vous — Monsieur le Savant!* No man withdraws alive from a conspiracy like ours."

We have said before that Olivier Dalibard was not physically brave; and the look of the *Chouan*, as those words were said, would have frozen the blood of many a bolder man. But the habitual hypocrisy of Dalibard enabled him to disguise his fear, and he replied, drily:

"*Monsieur le Chouan*, — it is not by threats that you will gain adherents to a desperate cause, which, on the contrary, requires mild words and flattering inducements. If you commit a violence — a murder — *mon cher* — Paris is not Bretagne; we have a police; you will be discovered."

"Ha, ha! — what then? — do you think I fear the guillotine?"

"For yourself — no; but for your leaders — yes! If you are discovered, and arrested for crime, do you fancy that the Police will not recognise the right arm of the terrible George Cadoudal? — that they will not guess that Cadoudal is at Paris? that Cadoudal will not accompany you to the guillotine?"

The *Chouan's* face fell. Olivier watched him, and pursued his advantage.

"I asked you to introduce to me this shadow of a prince, under which you would march to a counter-revolution. But I will be more easily contented. Present me to George Cadoudal, the hero of Morbihan; he is a man in whom I can trust, and with whom I can deal. What! — you hesitate? — How do you suppose enterprises of this nature can be carried on? If, from fear and distrust of each other, the man you would employ cannot meet the chief who directs him, there will be delay — confusion — panic, — and you will all perish by the executioner. And for me, Pierre Guillot, consider my position: I am in some favour with the First Consul — I have a station of respectability — a career lies before me. Can you think that I will hazard these, with my head to boot, like a rash child? Do you suppose that, in entering into this terrible contest, I would consent to treat only with subordinates? Do not deceive yourself. Again, I say, tell your employers that they must confer with me directly, or *je m'en lave les mains.*"

"I will repeat what you say," answered Guillot, sullenly. "Is this all?"

"All for the present," said Dalibard, slowly drawing on his gloves, and retreating towards the door. The *Chouan* watched him with a suspicious and sinister eye; and as the Provençal's hand was on the latch, he laid his own rough grasp on Dalibard's shoulder —

"I know not how it is, Monsieur Dalibard, but I mistrust you."

"Distrust is natural and prudent to all who conspire," replied the scholar, quietly. "I do not ask you to confide in me — your employers bade you seek me — I have mentioned my conditions — let them decide."

"You carry it off well, Monsieur Dalibard. And I am under

a solemn oath, which poor George made me take, knowing me to be a hot-headed, honest fellow — *mauvaise tête*, if you will — that I will keep my hand off pistol and knife upon mere suspicion — that nothing less than his word or than clear and positive proof of treachery shall put me out of good humour and into warm blood. But bear this with you, Monsieur Dalibard, if I once discover that you use our secrets to betray them,—should George see you, and one hair of his head come to injury through *your* hands, I will wring your neck as a good wife wrings a pullet's."

"I don't doubt your strength or your ferocity, Pierre Guillot; but my neck will be safe; you have enough to do to take care of your own — *au revoir*."

With a tone and look of calm and fearless irony, the scholar thus spoke and left the room; but when he was on the stairs, he paused, and caught at the balustrade — the sickness as of terror at some danger past, or to be, came over him; and this contrast between the self-command, or simulation which belongs to moral courage, and the feebleness of natural and constitutional cowardice, would have been sublime if shown in a noble cause. In one so corrupt, it but betrayed a nature doubly formidable; for treachery and murder hatch their brood amidst the folds of a hypocrite's cowardice.

While thus the interview between Dalibard and the conspirator, — we must bestow a glance upon the Provençal's home.

In an apartment in one of the principal streets, between the Boulevards and the Rue St. Honoré, a boy and a woman sate side by side, conversing in whispers. The boy was Gabriel Varney, the woman Lucretia Dalibard. The apartment was furnished in the then modern taste which affected classical forms; and though not without a certain elegance, had something meagre and comfortless in its slender tripods and thin-legged chairs. There was in the apartment that air which bespeaks the struggle for ap-

pearances — that struggle familiar with those of limited income, and vain aspirings, who want the taste which smoothes all inequalities, and gives a smile to home — that taste which affection seems to prompt, if not to create — which shows itself in a thousand nameless, costless trifles, each a grace. No sign was there of the household cares or industry of women. No flowers, no music, no embroidery frame, no work-table. Lucretia had none of the sweet feminine habits which betray so lovelily the whereabout of women. All was formal and precise, like rooms which we enter and leave — not those in which we settle and dwell.

Lucretia herself is changed, her air is more assured, her complexion more pale, the evil character of her mouth more firm and pronounced.

Gabriel, still a mere boy in years, has a premature look of man. The down shades his lips. His dress, though showy and theatrical, is no longer that of boyhood. His rounded cheek has grown thin, as with the care and thought which beset the anxious step of youth on entering into life.

Both, as before remarked, spoke in whispers; — both from time to time glanced fearfully at the door; both felt that they belonged to a hearth round which smile not the jocund graces of trust and love, and the heart's open ease.

"But," said Gabriel — "but if you would be safe, my father must have no secrets hid from you."

"I do not know that he has. He speaks to me frankly of his hopes — of the share he has in the discovery of the plot against the First Consul — of his interviews with Pierre Guillot, the Breton."

"Ah, because *there* your courage supports him, and your acuteness assists his own. Such secrets belong to his public life — his political schemes — with those he will trust you. It is his private life — his private projects you must know."

"But what does he conceal from me? Apart from politics, his whole mind seems bent on the very natural object of securing the intimacy with his rich cousin, Monsieur Bellanger, from whom he has a right to expect so large an inheritance."

"Bellanger is rich, but he is not much older than my father."

"He has bad health."

"No," said Gabriel, with a downcast eye and a strange smile — "he has not bad health, but he may not be long lived."

"How do you mean?" asked Lucretia, sinking her voice into a still lower whisper, while a shudder, she scarce knew why, passed over her frame.

"What does my father do," resumed Gabriel, "in that room at the top of the house? Does he tell you *that* secret?"

"He makes experiments in chemistry. You know that that was always his favourite study. You smile again! Gabriel, do not smile so; it appals me. Do you think there is some mystery in that chamber?"

"It matters not what we think, *belle mère* — it matters much what we know. If I were you, I *would* know what is in that chamber. I repeat, to be safe, you must have all his secrets or none. Hush, that is his step!"

The door handle turned noiselessly, and Olivier entered. His look fell on his son's face, which betrayed only apparent surprise at his unexpected return. He then glanced at Lucretia's, which was, as usual, cold and impenetrable.

"Gabriel," said Dalibard, gently, "I have come in for you. I have promised to take you to spend the day at Monsieur Bellanger's; you are a great favourite with Madame. Come, my boy. I shall be back soon, Lucretia. I shall but drop in to leave Gabriel at my cousin's."

Gabriel rose cheerfully, as if only alive to the expectation of the bon-bons and compliments he received habitually from Madame Bellanger.

"And you can take your drawing implements with you," continued Dalibard. "This good Monsieur Bellanger has given you permission to copy his Poussin."

"His Poussin! Ah, *that* is placed in his bed-room,* is it not?"

"Yes," answered Dalibard, briefly.

Gabriel lifted his sharp bright eyes to his father's face. Dalibard turned away.

"Come!" he said, with some impatience; and the boy took up his hat.

In another minute, Lucretia was alone.

Alone, in an English home, is a word implying no dreary solitude to an accomplished woman; but alone in that foreign land — alone in those half furnished, desolate apartments — few books, no musical instruments, no companions during the day to drop in; — *that* loneliness was wearing. And that mind so morbidly active! In the old Scottish legend, the Spirit that serves the wizard must be kept constantly employed; suspend its work for a moment, and it rends the enchanter. It is so with minds that crave for excitement, and live without relief of heart and affection, on the hard tasks of the intellect.

Lucretia mused over Gabriel's words and warning: "To be safe, you must know all his secrets or none." What was the secret which Dalibard had not communicated to her?

She rose, stole up the cold, cheerless stairs, and ascended to the attic which Dalibard had lately hired. It was locked; and

* It is scarcely necessary to observe that bed-chambers in Paris, when forming part of the suite of reception-rooms, are often decorated no less elaborately than the other apartments.

she observed that the lock was small — so small, that the key might be worn in a ring. She descended and entered her husband's usual cabinet, which adjoined the sitting-room. All the books which the house contained were there; a few works on metaphysics — Spinosa in especial — the great Italian histories, some volumes of statistics, many on physical and mechanical philosophy, and one or two works of biography and memoirs: — No light literature, that grace and flower of human culture — that best philosophy of all, humanizing us with gentle art, making us wise through the humours, elevated through the passions, tender in the affections of our kind! She took out one of the volumes that seemed less arid than the rest, for she was weary of her own thoughts, and began to read. To her surprise, the first passage she opened was singularly interesting, though the title was nothing more seductive than the "Life of a Physician of Padua, in the Sixteenth Century." It related to that singular epoch of terror in Italy, when some mysterious disease, varying in a thousand symptoms, baffled all remedy, and long defied all conjecture — a disease attacking chiefly the heads of families, father and husband — rarely women. In one city, seven hundred husbands perished, but not one wife! The disease was poison. The hero of the memoir was one of the earlier discoverers of the true cause of this household epidemic. He had been a chief authority in a commission of inquiry. Startling were the details given in the work; the anecdotes, the histories, the astonishing craft brought daily to bear on the victim, the wondrous perfidy of the subtle means, the variation of the certain murder — here swift as epilepsy — there slow and wasting as long decline: — the lecture was absorbing; and absorbed in the book Lucretia still was, when she heard Dalibard's voice behind; he was looking over her shoulder.

"A strange selection for so fair a student! *Enfant*, play not with such weapons!"

"But is this all true?"

"True, though scarce a fragment of the truth. The physician was a sorry chemist, and a worse philosopher. He blundered in his analysis of the means; and, if I remember rightly, he whines like a priest at the motives; for see you not what was really the cause of this spreading pestilence. It was the Saturnalia of the Weak — a burst of mocking licence against the Strong: it was more — it was the innate force of the individual waging war against the many."

"I do not understand you."

"No! In that age, husbands were, indeed, lords of the household: they married mere children for their lands; they neglected and betrayed them; they were inexorable if the wife committed the faults set before her example. Suddenly the wife found herself armed against her tyrant. His life was in her hands. So the weak had no mercy on the strong! But man, too, was then, even more than now, a lonely wrestler in a crowded arena. Brute force alone gave him distinction in courts; wealth alone brought him justice in the halls, or gave him safety in his home. Suddenly, the frail, puny man saw that he could reach the mortal part of his giant foe. The noiseless sling was in his hand — it smote Goliah from afar. Suddenly, the poor man, ground to the dust, spat upon by contempt, saw through the crowd of richer kinsmen, who shunned and bade him rot — saw those whose death made him heir to lordship, and gold, and palaces, and power, and esteem! As a worm through a wardrobe, that man ate through velvet and ermine, and gnawed out the hearts that beat in his way. No! A great intellect can comprehend these criminals, and account for the crime. It is a mighty thing to feel in one's self that one is an army — more than an army! What thousands and millions of men, with trumpet and banner, and under the sanction of glory, strive to do —

destroy a foe, — that, with little more than an effort of the will — with a drop, a grain, for all his arsenal — one man can do!"

There was a horrible enthusiasm about this reasoning devil as he spoke thus: his crest rose, his breast expanded. That animation which a noble thought gives to generous hearts, kindled in the face of the apologist for the darkest and basest of human crimes. Lucretia shuddered; but her gloomy imagination was spelled; there was an interest mingled with her terror.

"Hush! you appal me," she said, at last, timidly. "But, happily, this fearful art exists no more to tempt and destroy?"

"As a mere philosophical discovery, it might be amusing to a chemist to learn exactly what were the compounds of those ancient poisons," said Dalibard, not directly answering the implied question. "Portions of the art are indeed lost, unless, as I suspect, there is much credulous exaggeration in the accounts transmitted to us. To kill by a flower, a pair of gloves, a soap ball — kill by means which elude all possible suspicion — is it credible? What say you? An amusing research, indeed, if one had leisure! But enough of this now; it grows late. We dine with Monsieur de —. He wishes to let his hotel. Why, Lucretia, if we knew a little of this old art, *Par Dieu!* we could soon hire the hotel! Well, well, perhaps we may survive my cousin, Jean Bellanger!"

Three days afterwards, Lucretia stood by her husband's side in the secret chamber. From the hour when she left it, a change was perceptible in her countenance, which gradually removed from it the character of youth. Paler the cheek could scarce become, nor more cold the discontented, restless eye. But it was as if some great care had settled on her brow, and contracted yet more the stern outline of the lips. Gabriel noted the alteration; but he did not attempt to win her confidence. He was occupied rather in considering, first, if it were well for him to sound deeper into the mystery he suspected; and, secondly, to

what extent, and on what terms it became his interest to aid the designs in which, by Dalibard's hints and kindly treatment, he foresaw that he was meant to participate.

A word now on the rich kinsman of the Dalibards: Jean Bellanger had been one of those prudent republicans who had put the Revolution to profit. By birth a Marseillais, — he had settled in Paris, as an *épicier*, about the year 1785, and had distinguished himself by the adaptability and finesse which become those who fish in such troubled waters. He had sided with Mirabeau, next with Vergniaud, and the Girondins. These he forsook in time for Danton, whose facile corruptibility made him a seductive patron. He was a large purchaser in the sale of the emigrant property; he obtained a contract for the supply of the army in the Netherlands; he abandoned Danton as he had abandoned the Girondins, but without taking any active part in the after-proceedings of the Jacobins. His next connexion was with Tallien and Barras, and he enriched himself yet more under the Directory than he had done in the earlier stages of the Revolution. Under cover of an appearance of *bonhommie* and good humour, a frank laugh and open countenance, Jean Bellanger had always retained general popularity and good will; and was one of those whom the policy of the First Consul led him to conciliate. He had long since retired from the more vulgar departments of trade, but continued to flourish as an army contractor. He had a large hotel and a splendid establishment. He was one of the great capitalists of Paris. The relationship between Dalibard and Bellanger was not very close, it was that of cousins twice removed; and during Dalibard's previous residence at Paris, each embracing different parties, and each eager in his career, the blood-tie between them had not been much thought of, though they were good friends, and each respected the other for the discretion with which he had kept aloof from the more sanguinary excesses of the time. As Bellanger was not many years older

than Dalibard, as the former had but just married in the year 1791, and had naturally before him the prospect of a family — as his fortunes at that time, though rising, were unconfirmed, and as some nearer relations stood between them, in the shape of two promising sturdy nephews, Dalibard had not then calculated on any inheritance from his cousin. On his return, circumstances were widely altered — Bellanger had been married some years, and no issue had blessed his nuptials. His nephews, draughted into the conscription, had perished in Egypt. Dalibard apparently became his nearest relative.

To avarice or to worldly ambition, there was, undoubtedly, something very dazzling in the prospect thus opened to the eyes of Olivier Dalibard. The Contractor's splendid mode of living, vying with that of the *fermier-général* of old, the colossal masses of capital, by which he backed and supported speculations, that varied with an ingenuity rendered practical and profound by experience, inflamed into fever the morbid restlessness of fancy and intellect which characterized the evil scholar. For that restlessness seemed to supply to his nature, vices not constitutional to it. Dalibard had not the avarice that belongs either to a miser or a spendthrift. In his youth, his books and the simple desires of an abstract student sufficed to his wants, and a habit of method and order, a mechanical calculation which accompanied all his acts, from the least to the greatest — preserved him, even when most poor, from neediness and want. Nor was he by nature vain and ostentatious — those infirmities accompany a larger and more luxuriant nature. His philosophy rather despised, than inclined to, show. Yet since to plot and to scheme, made his sole amusement, his absorbing excitement, — so a man wrapped in himself, and with no generous ends in view, has little to plot or to scheme for, but objects of worldly aggrandizement. In this, Dalibard resembled one whom the intoxication of gambling has mastered, who neither wants, nor greatly prizes, the stake,

but who has grown wedded to the venture for it. It was a madness like that of a certain rich nobleman in our own country, who, with more money than he could spend, and with a skill, in all games where skill enters, that would have secured him success of itself, — having learned the art of cheating, could not resist its indulgence. No hazard, no warning, could restrain him — cheat he must — the propensity became iron-strong as a Greek destiny.

That the possible chance of an inheritance so magnificent should dazzle Lucretia and Gabriel, was yet more natural; for in them, it appealed to more direct and eloquent, though not more powerful, propensities. Gabriel had every vice which the greed of gain most irritates and excites. Intense covetousness lay at the core of his heart; he had the sensual temperament which yearns for every enjoyment, and takes pleasure in every pomp and show of life. Lucretia, with a hardness of mind that disdained luxury; and a certain grandeur, (if such a word may be applied to one so perverted,) that was incompatible with the sordid infirmities of the miser, had a determined and insatiable ambition to which gold was a necessary instrument. Wedded to one she loved, like Mainwaring, the ambition, as we have said in a former chapter, could have lived in another, and become devoted to intellectual efforts, in the nobler desire for power based on fame and genius. But now she had the gloomy cravings of one fallen, and the uneasy desire to restore herself to a lost position — she fed as an aliment upon scorn to bitterness, of all beings and all things around her. She was gnawed by that false fever which riots in those who seek by outward seemings and distinctions to console themselves for the want of their own self-esteem; or who, despising the world with which they are brought in contact, sigh for those worldly advantages, which alone justify to the world itself their contempt.

To these diseased infirmities of vanity or pride, whether ex-

hibited in Gabriel or Lucretia, Dalibard administered without apparent effort, not only by his conversation, but his habits of life. He mixed with those much wealthier than himself, but not better born — those who, in the hot and fierce ferment of that new society, were rising fast into new aristocracy, — fortunate soldiers, daring speculators, plunderers of many an argosy that had been wrecked in the Great Storm. Every one about them was actuated by the keen desire 'to make fortune' — the desire was contagious. They were not absolutely poor in the proper sense of the word poverty, with Dalibard's annuity and the interest of Lucretia's fortune, but they were poor compared to those with whom they associated — poor enough for disc ontent. Thus the image of the mighty wealth from which, perhaps, but a single life divided them, became horribly haunting. To Gabriel's sensual vision, the image presented itself in the shape of unlimited pleasure and prodigal riot; to Lucretia, it wore the solemn majesty of power; to Dalibard himself, it was but the Eureka of a calculation — the palpable reward of wile, and scheme, and dexterous combinations. The devil had temptations suited to each. Meanwhile, the Dalibards were more and more with the Bellangers. Olivier glided in to talk of the chances and changes of the state and the market. Lucretia sate for hours, listening mutely to the Contractor's boasts of past frauds, or submitting to the martyrdom of his victorious games at tric-trac. Gabriel, a spoiled darling, copied the pictures on the walls, complimented Madame, flattered Monsieur, and fawned on both for trinkets and crowns. Like three birds of night and omen, these three evil natures settled on the rich man's roof.

Was the rich man himself blind to the motives which budded forth into such attentive affection? His penetration was too acute — his ill opinion of mankind too strong, perhaps, for such amiable self-delusions. But he took all in good part, availed himself of Dalibard's hints and suggestions as to the employment

of his capital; was polite to Lucretia, and readily condemned her to be beaten at tric-trac, while he accepted with *bonhommie* Gabriel's spirited copies of his pictures. But at times, there was a gleam of satire and malice in his round gray eyes, and an inward chuckle at the caresses and flatteries he received, which perplexed Dalibard, and humbled Lucretia. Had his wealth been wholly at his own disposal, these signs would have been inauspicious, but the new law was strict, and the bulk of Bellanger's property could not be alienated from his nearest kin. Was not Dalibard the nearest?

These hopes and speculations did not, as we have seen, absorb the restless and rank energies of Dalibard's crooked, but capacious and grasping intellect. Patiently and ingeniously he pursued his main political object—the detection of that audacious and complicated conspiracy against the First Consul, which ended in the tragic deaths of Pichegru, the Duc D'Enghien, and the erring but illustrious hero of La Vendée, George Cadoudal. In the midst of these dark plots for personal aggrandizement and political fortune, we leave, for the moment, the sombre sullen soul of Olivier Dalibard.

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Time has passed on, and Spring is over the world; the seeds, buried in the earth, burst to flower; but man's breast knoweth not the sweet division of the seasons. In winter or summer, autumn or spring alike, his thoughts sow the germs of his actions, and day after day his destiny gathers in her harvests.

The joy-bells ring clear through the groves of Laughton — an heir is born to the old name and fair lands of St. John! And, as usual, the present race welcomes merrily in, that which shall succeed and replace it — that which shall thrust the enjoyers down into the black graves, and wrest from them the pleasant

goods of the world. The joy-bell of birth is a note of warning to the knell for the dead; it wakes the worms beneath the mould; the new-born, every year that it grows and flourishes, speeds the Parent to their feast. Yet who can predict that the infant shall become the heir? — who can tell that Death sits not side by side with the nurse at the cradle? Can the mother's hand measure out the woof of the Parcæ, or the father's eye detect, through the darkness of the morrow, the gleam of the fatal shears?

It is market-day, at a town in the midland districts of England. There, Trade takes its healthiest and most animated form. You see not the stunted form and hollow eye of the mechanic — poor slave of the capitalist — poor agent and victim of the arch disequalizer — Civilization. There, strides the burly form of the farmer; there, waits the ruddy hind with his flock; there, patient, sits the miller with his samples of corn; there, in the booths, gleam the humble wares which form the luxuries of cottage and farm. The thronging of men, and the clacking of whips, and the dull sound of wagon or dray, that parts the crowd as it passes, and the lowing of herds, and the bleating of sheep, all are sounds of movement and bustle, yet blent with the pastoral associations of the Primitive Commerce, when the link between market and farm was visible and direct.

Towards one large house in the centre of the brisk life ebbing on, you might see stream after stream pour its way. The large doors swinging light on their hinges, the gilt letters that shine above the threshold, the windows, with their shutters outside cased in iron and studded with nails, announce that that house is the Bank of the town. Come in with that yeoman, whose broad face tells its tale, sheepish and down-eyed — he has come not to invest, but to borrow. What matters, war is breaking out anew, to bring the time of high prices, and paper money, and credit. Honest yeoman, you will not be refused. He scratches his rough head, pulls a leg, as he calls it, when the clerk leans over the

counter, and asks to see "Muster Mawnering hisself." The clerk points to the little office-room of the new junior partner, who has brought ten thousand pounds, and a clear head, to the firm. And the yeoman's great boots creak heavily in. I told you so, honest yeoman; you come out with a smile on your brown face, and your hand, that might fell an ox, buttons up your huge breeches-pocket. You will ride home with a light heart — go and dine, and be merry.

The yeoman tramps to the Ordinary; plates clatter, tongues wag; and the borrower's full heart finds vent in a good word for that kind "Muster Mawnering." For a wonder, all join in the praise. "He 's an honour to the town; he 's a pride to the county — thof he 's such a friend at a pinch, he 's a rale mon of business! He 'll make the baunk worth a million! — and how well he spoke at the great county meeting about the war, and the laund, and them blood-thirsty Mounseers! If their members were loike him, Muster Fox would look small!"

The day declines; the town empties — whiskies, horses and carts, are giving life to the roads and the lanes — and the market is deserted, and the bank is shut up, and William Mainwaring walks back to his home at the skirts of the town — not villa, nor cottage — that plain English house with its cheerful face of red brick, and its solid squareness of shape — a symbol of substance in the fortunes of the owner! Yet, as he passes, he sees through the distant trees the hall of the member for the town. He pauses a moment, and sighs unquietly. That pause and that sigh betray the germ of ambition and discontent. Why should not he who can speak so well, be member for the town, instead of that stammering squire? But his reason has soon silenced the querulous murmur. He hastens his step — he is at home! And there, in the neat furnished drawing-room, which looks on the garden behind, hisses the welcoming tea-urn; and the piano is open, and there is a packet of new books on the table: and, best of all, there

is the glad face of the sweet English wife. The happy scene was characteristic of the time, just when the simpler and more innocent luxuries of the higher class spread, not to spoil, but refine the middle. The dress, air, mien, movements, of the young couple; the unassuming, suppressed, sober elegance of the house; the flower-garden, the books, and the music, evidences of cultivated taste, not signals of display, — all bespoke the gentle fusion of ranks, before rude and uneducated wealth, made in looms and lucky hits, rushed in to separate for ever the gentleman from the *parvenu*.

Spring smiles over Paris, over the spires of Nôtre Dame, and the crowded alleys of the Tuileries, over thousands and thousands eager, joyous, aspiring, reckless — the New Race of France — bound to one man's destiny, children of glory and of carnage, whose blood the wolf and the vulture scent, hungry, from afar!

The conspiracy against the life of the First Consul has been detected and defeated. Pichegru is in prison, George Cadoudal awaits his trial, the Duc D'Enghien sleeps in his bloody grave; the imperial crown is prepared for the great soldier, and the great soldier's creatures bask in the noonday sun. Olivier Dalibard is in high and lucrative employment: his rise is ascribed to his talents — his opinions. No service connected with the detection of the conspiracy is traced or traceable by the public eye. If such exist, it is known but to those who have no desire to reveal it. The old apartments are retained; but they are no longer dreary, and comfortless, and deserted. They are gay with draperies, and or-molu, and mirrors; and Madame Dalibard has her nights of reception, and Monsieur Dalibard has already his troops of clients. In that gigantic concentration of egotism which, under Napoleon, is called The State, Dalibard has found his place. He has served to swell the power of the unit, and the cipher gains importance by its position in the sum.

Jean Bellanger is no more. He died, not studdenly, and

yet of some quick disease — nervous exhaustion: his schemes, they said, had worn him out. But the estate of Dalibard, though prosperous, is not that of the heir to the dead millionaire. What mistake is this? The bulk of that wealth must go to the nearest kin — so runs the law. But the will is read; and, for the first time, Olivier Dalibard learns that the dead man had a son — a son by a former marriage — the marriage undeclared, unknown, amidst the riot of the revolution; for the wife was the daughter of a *proscrit*. The son had been reared at a distance, put to school at Lyons, and, unavowed to the second wife, who had brought an ample dower, and whom that discovery might have deterred from the altar. Unacknowledged through life — in death, at least, the son's rights are proclaimed: and Olivier Dalibard feels that Jean Bellanger has died in vain! For days has the pale Provençal been closeted with lawyers; but there is no hope in litigation. The proofs of the marriage, the birth, the identity, come out clear and clearer; and the beardless schoolboy at Lyons reaps all the profit of those nameless schemes and that mysterious death. Olivier Dalibard desires the friendship — the intimacy of the heir. But the heir is consigned to the guardianship of a merchant at Lyons, near of kin to his mother — and the guardian responds but coldly to Olivier's letters. Suddenly the defeated aspirant seems reconciled to his loss. The widow Bellanger has her own separate fortune; and it is large, beyond expectation. In addition to the wealth she brought the deceased, his affection had led him to invest vast sums in her name. The widow, then, is rich — rich as the heir himself. She is still fair. Poor woman, she needs consolation! But, meanwhile, the nights of Olivier Dalibard are disturbed and broken. His eye, in the day-time, is haggard and anxious; he is seldom seen on foot in the streets. Fear is his companion by day, and sits at night on his pillow. The *Chouan*, Pierre Guillot, who looked to George Cadoudal as a god, knows that

George Cadoudal has been betrayed, and suspects Olivier Dalibard; and the *Chouan* has an arm of iron and a heart steeled against all mercy. Oh, how the pale scholar thirsted for that *Chouan's* blood! With what relentless pertinacity, with what ingenious research he had set all the hounds of the police upon the track of that single man! How notably he had failed! An avenger lived; and Olivier Dalibard started at his own shadow on the wall. But he did not the less continue to plot and to intrigue — nay, such occupation became more necessary, as an escape from himself.

And, in the meanwhile, Olivier Dalibard sought to take courage from the recollection that the *Chouan* had taken an oath (and he knew that oaths are held sacred with the Bretons) that he would keep his hand from his knife, unless he had clear evidence of treachery; — such evidence existed, but only in Dalibard's desk, or the archives of Fouché. Tush, he was safe! And so, when, from dreams of fear, he started at the depth of night, so his bolder wife would whisper to him with firm uncaressing lips. Olivier Dalibard, thou fearest the living, dost thou never fear the dead? Thy dreams are haunted with a spectre. Why takes it not the accusing shape of thy mouldering kinsman? Dalibard would have answered, for he was a philosopher in his cowardice, "*Il n'y a que les morts, qui ne reviennent pas.*"

It is the notable convenience of us narrators to represent, by what is called *soliloquy*, the thoughts — the interior of the personages we describe. And this is almost the master-work of the tale-teller — that is, if the soliloquy be really in words, what self-commune is in the dim and tangled recesses of the human heart! But to this privilege we are rarely admitted in the case of Olivier Dalibard; for he rarely communed with himself; a sort of mental calculation, it is true, eternally went on within him, like the wheels of a destiny; but it had become a mechanical operation — seldom disturbed by that *consciousness of*

thought, with its struggles of fear and doubt, conscience and crime, which gives its appalling interest to the soliloquy of tragedy. Amidst the tremendous secrecy of that profound intellect, as at the bottom of a sea, only monstrous images of terror, things of prey, stirred in cold-blooded and devouring life; but into these deeps Olivier himself did not dive. He did not face his own soul; his outer life and his inner life seemed separate individualities, just as, in some complicated State, the social machine goes on through all its numberless cycles of vice and dread, whatever the acts of the government, which is the representative of the state, and stands for the state in the shallow judgment of history.

Before this time, Olivier Dalibard's manner to his son had greatly changed from the indifference it betrayed in England: it was kind and affectionate, almost caressing; while, on the other hand, Gabriel, as if in possession of some secret which gave him power over his father, took a more careless and independent tone, often absented himself from the house for days together, joined the revels of young profligates older than himself, with whom he had formed acquaintance, indulged in spendthrift expenses, and plunged prematurely into the stream of vicious pleasure that oozed through the mud of Paris.

One morning, Dalibard, returning from a visit to Madame Bellanger, found Gabriel alone in the *salon*, contemplating his fair face and gay dress in one of the mirrors, and smoothing down the hair, which he wore long and sleek, as in the portraits of Raffaelle. Dalibard's lip curled at the boy's coxcombry, though such tastes he himself had fostered, according to his ruling principles, that, to govern, you must find a foible, or instil it; but the sneer changed into a smile.

"Are you satisfied with yourself, *joli garçon?*" he said, with saturnine playfulness.

"At least, Sir, I hope that you will not be ashamed of me,

when you formally legitimatize me as your son. The time has come, you know, to keep your promise."

"And it shall be kept, do not fear. But first, I have an employment for you — a mission — your first embassy, Gabriel."

"I listen, Sir."

"I have to send to England a communication of the utmost importance — public importance — to the secret agent of the French government. We are on the eve of a descent on England. We are in correspondence with some in London on whom we count for support. A man might be suspected, and searched — mind, *searched*. You, a boy, with English name and speech, will be my safest envoy. Buonaparte approves my selection. On your return, he permits me to present you to him. He loves the rising generation. In a few days, you will be prepared to start."

Despite the calm tone of the father, so had the son, from the instinct of fear and self-preservation, studied every accent, every glance of Olivier — so had he constituted himself a spy upon the heart whose perfidy was ever armed, that he detected at once in the proposal some scheme hostile to his interests. He made, however, no opposition to the plan suggested; and, seemingly satisfied with his obedience, the father dismissed him.

As soon as he was in the streets, Gabriel went straight to the house of Madame Bellanger. The hotel had been purchased in her name, and she therefore retained it. Since her husband's death, he had avoided that house, before so familiar to him; and now he grew pale, and breathed hard, as he passed by the porter's lodge up the lofty stairs.

He knew of his father's recent and constant visits at the house; and, without conjecturing precisely what were Olivier's designs, he connected them, in the natural and acquired shrewdness he possessed, with the wealthy widow. He re-

solved to watch, observe, and draw his own conclusions. As he entered Madame Bellanger's room rather abruptly, he observed her push aside amongst her papers something she had been gazing on — something which sparkled to his eyes. He sate himself down close to her, with the caressing manner he usually adopted towards women; and in the midst of the babbling talk with which ladies generally honour boys, he suddenly, and as if by accident, displaced the papers, and saw his father's miniature set in brilliants. The start of the widow, her blush, and her exclamation, strengthened the light that flashed upon his mind. "O-ho, I see now," he said, laughing, "why my father is always praising black hair; and — nay, nay — gentlemen may admire ladies in Paris, surely!"

"Pooh, my dear child, your father is an old friend of my poor husband's, and a near relation, too! But, Gabriel, *mon petit ange!* you had better not say at home that you have seen this picture, — Madame Dalibard might be foolish enough to be angry."

"To be sure not. I have kept a secret before now!" and again the boy's cheek grew pale, and he looked hurriedly round.

"And you are very fond of Madame Dalibard, too, so you must not vex her."

"Who says I 'm fond of Madame Dalibard? — a stepmother!"

"Why, your father, of course — *il est si bon — ce pauvre Dalibard;* and all men like cheerful faces, but then, poor lady — an English woman, so strange here — very natural she should fret, — and with bad health, too."

"Bad health, ah! I remember! — *she* also does not seem likely to live long!"

"So your poor father apprehends. Well, well, how uncertain life is! Who would have thought dear Bellanger would have —"

Gabriel rose hastily, and interrupted the widow's pathetic reflections. "I only ran in to say, *Bon jour*. I must leave you now."

"Adieu, my dear boy — not a word on the miniature! By-the-bye, here 's a shirt-pin for you — *tu es joli comme un amour*."

All was now clear to Gabriel — it was necessary to get rid of him, and for ever! Dalibard might dread his attachment to Lucretia — he would dread still more his closer intimacy with the widow of Bellanger, should that widow wed again — and Dalibard, freed like her (by what means?) be her choice! Into that abyss of wickedness, fathomless to the innocent, the young villanous eye plunged, and surveyed the ground; a terror seized on him — a terror of life and death. Would Dalibard spare even his own son, if that son had the power to injure. This mission — was it exile only? — only a fall back to the old squalor of his uncle's studio? — only the laying aside of a useless tool — or was it a snare to the grave? Demon, as Dalibard was, doubtless the boy wronged him. But guilt construes guilt for the worst.

Gabriel had formerly enjoyed the thought to match himself, should danger come, with Dalibard; the hour *had* come, and he felt his impotence. Brave his father, and refuse to leave France! from that even his reckless hardihood shrank as from inevitable destruction. But to depart — be the poor victim and dupe; after having been let loose amongst the riot of pleasure, to return to labour and privation — from that option his vanity and his senses vindictively revolted. And Lucretia! — the only being who seemed to have a human kindness to him! — through all the vicious egotism of his nature, he had some grateful sentiments for her! — and even the egotism assisted that unwonted amiability, for he felt that, Lucretia gone, he had no hold on his father's house — that the home of her successor never would

be his. While thus brooding, he lifted his eyes, and saw Dalibard pass in his carriage towards the Tuileries. The house, then, was clear — he could see Lucretia alone. He formed his resolution at once, and turned homewards. As he did so, he observed a man at the angle of the street, whose eyes followed Dalibard's carriage with an expression of unmistakeable hate and revenge; but scarcely had he marked the countenance, before the man, looking hurriedly round, darted away and was lost amongst the crowd.

Now, that countenance was not quite unfamiliar to Gabriel. He had seen it before, as he saw it now, — hastily, and, as it were, by fearful snatches. Once he had marked, on returning home at twilight, a figure lurking by the house — and something in the quickness with which it turned from his gaze, joined to his knowledge of Dalibard's apprehensions, made him mention the circumstance to his father, when he entered. Dalibard bade him hasten with a note, written hurriedly, to an agent of the police, whom he kept lodged near at hand. The man was still on the threshold, when the boy went out on this errand, and he caught a glimpse of his face; but before the police agent reached the spot, the ill-omened apparition had vanished. Gabriel now, as his eye rested full upon that threatening brow, and those burning eyes, was convinced that he saw before him the terrible Pierre Guillot, whose very name blenched his father's cheek. When the figure retreated, he resolved at once to pursue. He hurried through the crowd amidst which the man had disappeared, and looked eagerly into the faces of those he jostled — sometimes, at the distance, he caught sight of a figure, which appeared to resemble the one which he pursued, but the likeness faded on approach. The chase, however, vague and desultory as it was, led him on till his way was lost amongst labyrinths of narrow and unfamiliar streets. Heated and thirsty, he paused at last before a small *café* — entered to ask for a draught of lemonade — and

behold, chance had favoured him! — the man he sought was seated there, before a bottle of wine, and intently reading the newspaper. Gabriel sat himself down at the adjoining table. In a few moments the man was joined by a new comer — the two conversed, but in whispers so low, that Gabriel was unable to hear their conversation — though he caught more than once the name of "George." Both the men were violently excited, and the expression of their countenances was menacing and sinister. The first-comer pointed often to the newspaper, and read passages from it to his companion. This suggested to Gabriel the demand for another journal. When the waiter brought it to him, his eye rested upon a long paragraph, in which the name of George Cadoudal frequently occurred. In fact, all the journals of the day were filled with speculations on the conspiracy and trial of that fiery martyr to an erring adaptation of a noble principle. Gabriel knew that his father had had a principal share in the detection of the defeated enterprise; and his previous persuasions were confirmed.

His sense of hearing grew sharper by continued effort, and at length he heard the first-comer say distinctly — "If I were but sure that I had brought this fate upon George, by introducing to him that accursed Dalibard — if my oath did but justify me, I would —;" the concluding sentence was lost. A few moments after, the two men rose, and from the familiar words that passed between them and the master of the *café*, who approached, himself, to receive the reckoning, the shrewd boy perceived that the place was no unaccustomed haunt. He crept nearer and nearer; and as the landlord shook hands with his customer, he heard distinctly the former address him by the name of "Guillot." When the men withdrew, Gabriel followed them at a distance, (taking care first to impress on his memory the name of the *café*, and the street in which it was placed) and, as he thought, unobserved; he was mistaken. Suddenly, in one street, more solitary than

the rest, the man whom he was mainly bent on tracking, turned round — advanced to Gabriel, who was on the other side of the street, and laid his hand upon him so abruptly, that the boy was fairly taken by surprise.

"Who bade you follow us?" said he, with so dark and fell an expression of countenance, that even Gabriel's courage failed him: "nó evasion — no lies — speak out, and at once;" and the grasp tightened on the boy's throat.

Gabriel's readiness of resource and presence of mind did not long forsake him.

"Loose your hold, and I will tell you — you stifle me." The man slightly relaxed his grasp, and Gabriel said, quickly — "My mother perished on the guillotine in the Reign of Terror; I am for the Bourbons. I thought I overheard words which showed sympathy for poor George, the brave *Chouan*. I followed you; for I thought I was following friends."

The man smiled as he fixed his steady eye upon the unflinching child: "My poor lad," he said, gently, "I believe you — pardon me — but follow us no more — we are dangerous!" He waved his hand, and strode away — rejoined his companion, and Gabriel reluctantly abandoned the pursuit, and went homeward. It was long before he reached his father's house, for he had strayed into a strange quarter of Paris, and had frequently to inquire the way. At length, he reached home, and ascended the stairs to a small room, in which Lucretia usually sate, and which was divided by a narrow corridor from the sleeping chamber of herself and Dalibard. His stepmother, leaning her cheek upon her hand, was seated by the window, so absorbed in some gloomy thoughts, which cast over her rigid face a shade, intense and solemn as despair, that she did not perceive the approach of the boy till he threw his arm round her neck, and then she started as in alarm —

"You! only *you*," she said, with a constrained smile; "see, my nerves are not so strong as they were!"

"You are disturbed, *belle mère*, has *he* been vexing you?"

"He — Dalibard — no, indeed, we were only, this morning, discussing matters of business."

"Business! — that means money!"

"Truly," said Lucretia, "money does make the staple of life's business. In spite of his new appointment, your father needs some sums in hand — favours are to be bought — opportunities for speculation occur, and —"

"And my father," interrupted Gabriel, "wishes your consent to raise the rest of your portion."

Lucretia looked surprised, but answered quietly: "He had my consent long since, but the trustees to the marriage settlement — mere men of business — my uncle's bankers, for I had lost all claim on my kindred — refuse, or at least interpose such difficulties as amount to refusal."

"But that reply came some days since," said Gabriel, musingly.

"How did you know — did your father tell you?"

"Poor *belle mère!*" said Gabriel, almost with pity, "can you live in this house, and not watch all that passes — every stranger, every message, every letter? — But what, then, does he wish with you?"

"He has suggested my returning to England, and seeing the trustees myself. His interest can obtain my passport."

"And you have refused?"

"I have not consented."

"Consent! — Hush! — your maid — Marie — is not waiting without," and Gabriel rose and looked out; "no, confound these doors!—none close as they ought in this house. Is it not a clause in your settlement that the half of your fortune now invested goes to the survivor?"

"It is," replied Lucretia, struck and thrilled at the question. "How, again, did you know this?"

"I saw my father reading the copy. If you die first, then, he has all! If he merely wanted the money, he would not send you away!"

There was a terrible pause. Gabriel resumed: "I trust you, it may be, with my life; but I will speak out. My father goes much to Bellanger's widow — she is rich and weak. Come to England! Yes, *come* — for he is about to dismiss *me*. He fears that I shall be in the way, to warn you, perhaps, or to — to — in short, *both* of us are in his way. He gives you an escape. Once in England, the war which is breaking out will prevent your return. He will twist the laws of divorce to his favour — he will marry again! What then? — he spares you what remains of your fortune — he spares your life. Remain here — cross his schemes — and — no, no; — come to England — safer anywhere than here!"

As he spoke, great changes had passed over Lucretia's countenance. At first it was the flash of conviction, then the stunned shock of horror; now she rose — rose to her full height — and there was a livid and deadly light in her eyes — the light of conscious courage, and power, and revenge. "Fool," she muttered, "with all his craft! Fool, fool! As if, in the war of household perfidy, the woman did not always conquer! Man's only chance is to be mailed in honour!"

"But," said Gabriel, overhearing her, "but you do not remember what it is. There is nothing you can see, and guard against. It is not like an enemy face to face; it is death in the food, in the air, in the touch. You stretch out your arms in the dark — you feel nothing, and you die! Oh, do not fancy that I have not thought well (for I am almost a man now) if there were no means to resist — there are none! As well make head against

the plague — it is in the atmosphere. Come to England, and return. Live poorly, if you must — but live! — but *live!*"

"Return to England poor and despised, and bound still to him, or a disgraced and divorced wife — disgraced by the low-born dependent on my kinsman's house — and fawn perhaps upon my sister and her husband for bread! Never! — I am at my post, and I will not fly!"

"Brave! brave!" said the boy, clapping his hands, and sincerely moved by a daring superior to his own — "I wish I could help you!"

Lucretia's eye rested on him with the full gaze, so rare in its looks. She drew him to her, and kissed his brow — "Boy, through life, whatever our guilt and its doom, we are bound to each other. I may yet live to have wealth — if so, it is yours as a son's. I may be iron to others — never to you. Enough of this — I must reflect!" She passed her hand over her eyes a moment, and resumed — "You would help me in my self-defence; I think you can. You have been more alert in your watch than I have. You must have means I have not secured. Your father guards well all his papers!"

"I have keys to every desk. My foot passed the threshold of that room under the roof, before yours. But, no; his powers can never be yours! He has never confided to you half his secrets! He has antidotes for every — every —"

"Hist! what noise is that? Only the shower on the casements! No, no, child, that is not my object. Cadoudal's conspiracy! Your father has letters from Fouché, which show how he has betrayed others who are stronger to avenge than a woman and a boy."

"Well!"

"I would have those letters! Give me the keys! — But hold! — Gabriel — Gabriel, you may yet misjudge him. This wo-

man — wife to the dead man — *his* wife! Horror! Have you no proofs of what you imply?"

"Proofs!" echoed Gabriel, in a tone of wonder, "I can but see and conjecture. You are warned, watch and decide for yourself. But again I say, come to England! *I* shall go!"

Without reply, Lucretia took the keys from Gabriel's half-reluctant hand, and passed into her husband's writing-room. When she had entered, she locked the door. She passed at once to a huge secretary, of which the key was small as a fairy's work. She opened it with ease by one of the counterfeits. No love correspondence — the first object of her search, for she was woman — met her eye. What need of letters, when interviews were so facile! But she soon found a document that told all which love-letters could tell — it was an account of the monies and possessions of Madame Bellanger — and there were pencil notes on the margin: — "Vautran will give 400,000 francs for the lands in Auvergne — to be accepted. Consult on the power of sale granted to a second husband. Query, if there is no chance of the heir-at-law disputing the monies invested in Madame B.'s name,"— and such memoranda as a man notes down in the schedule of properties about to be his own. In these inscriptions there was a hideous mockery of all love — like the blue-lights of corruption, they showed the black vault of the heart. The pale reader saw what her own attractions had been, and, fallen as she was, she smiled superior in her bitterness of scorn. Arranged methodically with the precision of business, she found the letters she next looked for; — one recognising Dalibard's services in the detection of the conspiracy, and authorizing him to employ the police in the search of Pierre Guillot, sufficed for her purpose. She withdrew, and secreted it. She was about to lock up the secretary, when her eye fell on the title of a small MS. volume in a corner; and as she read, she pressed one hand convulsively to her heart, while, twice with the other, she grasped the volume,

and twice withdrew the grasp. The title ran harmlessly thus: — "*Philosophical and chemical inquiries into the nature and materials of the poisons in use between the* 14*th and* 16*th centuries.*" Hurriedly, and at last, as if doubtful of herself, she left the MS., closed the secretary, and returned to Gabriel.

"You have got the paper you seek?" he said.

"Yes."

"Then whatever you do, you must be quick — he will soon discover the loss."

"I will be quick."

"It is I whom he will suspect," said Gabriel, in alarm, as that thought struck him. "No, for my sake, do not take the letter till I am gone. Do not fear, in the meantime — he will do nothing against you, while I am here."

"I will replace the letter till then," said Lucretia, meekly. "You have a right to my first thoughts." So she went back, and Gabriel, (suspicious, perhaps,) crept after her.

As she replaced the document, he pointed to the MS. which had tempted her — "I have seen that before, how I longed for it! If anything ever happens to him, I claim *that* as my legacy."

Their hands met as he said this, and grasped each other convulsively; Lucretia relocked the secretary, and when she gained the next room, she tottered to a chair. Her strong nerves gave way for the moment; she uttered no cry, but, by the whiteness of her face, Gabriel saw that she was senseless; senseless for a minute or so — scarcely more. But the return to consciousness with a clenched hand, and a brow of defiance, and a stare of mingled desperation and dismay, seemed rather the awaking from some frightful dream of violence and struggle than the slow languid recovery from the faintness of a swoon. Yes, henceforth, to sleep, was to couch by a serpent — to breathe was to listen for the avalanche! Thou, who didst trifle so wantonly with Treason, now gravely front the grim comrade thou hast won;

thou, scheming desecrator of the Household Gods, now learn, to the last page of dark knowledge, what the hearth is without them!

Gabriel was strangely moved as he beheld that proud and solitary despair. An instinct of nature had hitherto checked him from actively aiding Lucretia in that struggle with his father, which could but end in the destruction of one or the other. He had contented himself with forewarnings, with hints, with indirect suggestions; but now, all his sympathy was so strongly roused on her behalf, that the last faint scruple of filial conscience vanished into the abyss of blood, over which stood that lonely Titaness. He drew near, and, clasping her hand, said, in a quick and broken voice —

"Listen! You know where to find proof of my fa — that is, of — Dalibard's treason to the conspirators; you know the name of the man he dreads as an avenger, and you know that he waits but the proof to strike; but you do not know where to find that man, if his revenge is wanting for yourself. The police has not hunted him out; how can you? Accident has made me acquainted with one of his haunts. Give me a single promise, and I will put you at least upon that clue — weak, perhaps, but as yet the sole one to be followed. Promise me that, only in defence of your own life, not for mere jealousy, you will avail yourself of the knowledge, and you shall know all I do!"

"Do you think," said Lucretia, in a calm, cold voice, "that it is for jealousy, which is love, that I would murder all hope, all peace; for we have here — (and she smote her breast) — here, if not elsewhere, a heaven and a hell! Son, I will not harm your father, except in self-defence! But tell me nothing that may make the son a party in the father's doom."

"The father slew the mother," muttered Gabriel, between his clenched teeth; "and to me, you have well nigh supplied her place. Strike, if need be, in her name! If you are driven

to want the arm of Pierre Guillot, seek news of him at the *Café Dufour*, *Rue S —*, *Boulevard du Temple*. Be calm now, I hear your husband's step."

A few days more, and Gabriel is gone! Wife and husband are alone with each other. Lucretia has refused to depart. Then that mute coma of horror! that suspense of two foes in the conflict of death — for the subtle prying eye of Olivier Dalibard sees that he himself is suspected — farther he shuns from sifting! Glance fastens on glance, and then hurries smilingly away. From the cup, grins a skeleton — at the board, warns a spectre. But how kind still the words, and how gentle the tone; and they lie down side by side in the marriage bed — brain plotting against brain, heart loathing heart. It is a duel of life and death, between those sworn through life and beyond death at the altar. But it is carried on with all the forms and courtesies of duel in the age of chivalry. No conjugal wrangling — no slip of the tongue; — the oil is on the surface of the wave — the monsters in the hell of the abyss war invisibly below. At length, a dull torpor creeps over the woman — she feels the taint in her veins, — the slow victory is begun. What mattered all her vigilance and caution? Vainly glide from the pangs of the serpent, his very breath suffices to destroy! Pure seems the draught and wholesome the viand — that master of the science of murder needs not the means of the bungler! Then, keen and strong from the creeping lethargy started the fierce instinct of self and the ruthless impulse of revenge. Not too late yet to escape; for those subtle banes, that are to defy all detection, work but slowly to their end.

One evening, a woman, closely mantled, stood at watch by the angle of a wall. The light came dim and muffled from the window of a *café* hard at hand — the reflection slept amidst the shadows on the dark pavement, and, save a solitary lamp, swung at distance in the vista over the centre of the narrow

street, no other ray broke the gloom. The night was clouded and starless, the wind moaned at gusts, and the rain fell heavily; but the gloom and the loneliness did not appal the eye, and the wind did not chill the heart, and the rain fell unheeded on the head, of the woman at her post. At times, she paused, in her slow, sentry-like pace to and fro, to look through the window of the *café*, and her gaze fell always on one figure seated apart from the rest. At length, her pulse beat more quickly, and the patient lips smiled sternly. The figure had risen to depart. A man came out, and walked quickly up the street, the woman approached, and when the man was under the single lamp swung aloft, he felt his arm touched; the woman was at his side, and looking steadily into his face —

"You are Pierre Guillot, the Breton, the friend of George Cadoudal. Will you be his avenger?"

The *Chouan's* first impulse had been to place his hand in his vest, and something shone bright in the lamplight, clasped in those iron fingers. The voice and the manner reassured him, and he answered readily —

"I am he whom you seek, and I only live to avenge."

"Read, then, and act," answered the woman, and she placed a paper in his hands.

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At Laughton, the babe is on the breast of the fair mother; and the father sits beside the bed; and mother and father dispute almost angrily whether mother or father, those soft rounded features of slumbering infancy resemble most. At the red house, near the market town, there is a hospitable bustle. William is home, earlier than usual. Within the last hour, Susan has been thrice into every room. Husband and wife are now watching

at the window. The good Fieldens, with a coach full of children, are expected, every moment, on a week's visit, at least.

In the *café*, in the *Boulevard du Temple*, sit Pierre Guillot, the *Chouan*, and another of the old band of *brigands*, whom George Cadoudal had mustered in Paris. There is an expression of content on Guillot's countenance — it seems more open than usual, and there is a complacent smile on his lips. He is whispering low to his friend, in the intervals of eating, an employment pursued with the hearty gusto of a hungry man. But his friend does not seem to sympathize with the cheerful feelings of his comrade; he is pale, and there is terror on his face; and you may see that the journal in his hand trembles like a leaf.

In the gardens of the Tuileries, some score or so of gossips groupe together.

"And no news of the murderer?" asked one.

"No; but a man who had been friend to Robespierre must have made secret enemies enough."

"*Ce pauvre Dalibard!* He was not mixed up with the *Terrorists*, nevertheless."

"Ah, but the more deadly for that, perhaps — a sly man was Olivier Dalibard!"

"What 's the matter?" said an *employé*, lounging up to the groupe. "Are you talking of Olivier Dalibard. It is but the other day he had Marsan's appointment. He is now to have Pleyel's. I heard it two days ago — a capital thing! *Peste*, *il ira loin!* We shall see him a senator soon."

"Speak for yourself," quoth a *ci-devant* Abbé, with a laugh. "I should be sorry to see him again, soon, wherever he is."

"*Plait-il?* — I don't understand you!"

"Don't you know that Olivier Dalibard is murdered — found stabbed — in his own house, too!"

"*Ciel!* Pray tell me all you know. — His place, then, is vacant!"

"Why, it seems that Dalibard, who had been brought up to medicine, was still fond of chemical experiments. He hired a room at the top of the house for such scientific amusements. He was accustomed to spend part of his nights there. They found him at morning, bathed in his blood, with three ghastly wounds in his side, and his fingers cut to the bone. He had struggled hard with the knife that butchered him."

"In his own house!" said a lawyer: "some servant or spend-thrift heir!"

"He has no heir but young Bellanger, who will be *riche à millions*, and is now but a school-boy at Lyons. No; it seems that the window was left open and that it communicates with the roof tops. There, the murderer had entered, and by that way escaped, for they found the leads of the gutter dabbled with blood. The next house was uninhabited — easy enough to get in there, and lie *perdu* till night."

"Hum," said the lawyer, "but the assassin could only have learned Dalibard's habits from some one in the house. Was the deceased married?"

"Oh, yes; to an Englishwoman."

"She had lovers, perhaps?"

"Pooh! lovers! — the happiest couple ever known! You should have seen them together. I dined there last week."

"It is strange!" said the lawyer.

"And he was getting on so well," muttered a hungry-looking man.

"And his place is vacant!" repeated the *employé*, as he quitted the crowd, abstractedly.

In the house of Olivier Dalibard sits Lucretia, alone, and in her own usual morning-room. The officer, appointed to such tasks by the French law, has performed his visit, and made his notes, and expressed condolence with the widow, and promised justice and retribution, and placed his seal on the locks till the

Representatives of the heir-at-law shall arrive; and the heir-at-law is the very boy who had succeeded so unexpectedly to the wealth of Jean Bellanger, the Contractor! But Lucretia has obtained beforehand all she wishes to save from the rest. An open box is on the floor, into which her hand drops noiselessly a volume in manuscript. On the fore-finger of that hand is a ring, larger and more massive than those usually worn by women; — by Lucretia never worn before. Why should that ring have been selected with such care from the dead man's hoards? why so precious the dull opal in the cumbrous setting?— From that hand the volume drops without sound into the box, as those whom the secrets of the volume instruct you to destroy, may drop without noise into the grave. The trace of some illness, recent and deep, nor conquered yet, has ploughed lines in that young countenance, and dimmed the light of those searching eyes. Yet, courage! the poison is arrested — the poisoner is no more — minds like thine, stern woman, are cased in coffers of steel, and the rust, as yet, has gnawed no deeper than the surface. So, over that face stamped with bodily suffering, plays a calm smile of triumph. The schemer has baffled the schemer! Turn now to the right, pass by that narrow corridor, you are in the marriage chamber — the windows are closed. Tall tapers burn at the foot of the bed. Now, go back to that narrow corridor; disregarded, thrown aside, are a cloth and a besom; the cloth is wet still; but here, and there, the red stains are dry, and clotted as with bloody glue; and the hairs of the besom start up, torn and ragged, as if the bristles had a sense of some horror — as if things inanimate still partook of men's dread at men's deeds. If you passed through the corridor, and saw in the shadow of the wall that homeliest of instruments cast away and forgotten, you would smile at the slatternly housework. But if you knew that a corpse had been borne down those stairs to the left — borne along those floors to that marriage bed,

with the blood oozing, and gushing, and plashing below, as the bearers passed with their burthen, then, straight that dead thing would take the awe of the dead being; it told its own tale of violence and murder; it had dabbled in the gore of the violated clay; it had become an evidence of the crime. No wonder that its hairs bristled up, sharp and ragged, in the shadow of the wall!

The first part of the tragedy ends. Let fall the curtain. When next it rises, years will have passed away, graves uncounted will have wrought fresh hollows in our merry sepulchre — sweet earth! Take a sand from the shore, take a drop from the ocean, less than sand-grain and drop in man's planet one Death and one Crime! On the map, trace all oceans, and search out every shore, — more than seas, more than lands, in God's balance shall weigh one Death and one Crime!

PART THE SECOND.

PROLOGUE TO PART THE SECOND.

The century has advanced: The rush of the deluge has ebbed back, the old landmarks have reappeared; the dynasties Napoleon willed into life have crumbled to the dust; the plough has passed over Waterloo; autumn after autumn the harvests have glittered on that grave of an empire. Through the immense ocean of universal change, we look back on the single track which our frail boat has cut through the waste. As a star shines impartially over the measureless expanse, though it seems to gild but *one* broken line to each eye; so, as our memory gazes on the past, the light spreads not over all the breadth of the waste, where nations have battled, and argosies gone down — it falls, narrow and confined, along the single course we have taken: We lean over the small raft on which we float, and see the sparkles but reflected from the waves that it divides.

On the terrace at Laughton, but *one* step paces slowly. The bride clings not now to the bridegroom's arm. Though pale and worn, it is still the same gentle face; but the blush of woman's love has gone from it evermore.

Charles Vernon, (to call him still by the name in which he is best known to us,) sleeps in the vault of the Saint Johns. He had lived longer than he himself had expected, than his physician had hoped — lived, cheerful and happy, amidst quiet pursuits and innocent excitements. Three sons had blessed his hearth, to mourn over his grave. But the two elder were delicate and sickly. They did not long survive him, and died within a

few months of each other. The third seemed formed of a different mould and constitution from his brethren. To him descended the ancient heritage of Laughton, and he promised to enjoy it long.

It is Vernon's widow who walks alone in the stately terrace; sad still, for she loved well the choice of her youth, and she misses yet the children in the grave; from the date of Vernon's death, she wore mourning without and within; and the sorrows that came later, broke more the bruised reed; — sad still, but resigned. One son survives; and earth yet has the troubled hopes and the holy fears of affection. Though that son be afar, in sport or in earnest, in pleasure or in toil, working out his destiny as man, still that step is less solitary than it seems. When does the son's image not walk beside the mother? Though she lives in seclusion, though the gay world tempts no more, the gay world is yet linked to her thoughts. From the distance she hears its murmurs in music. Her fancy still mingles with the crowd, and follows one, to her eye, outshining all the rest. Never vain in herself, she is vain now of another; and the small triumphs of the young and well born seem trophies of renown to the eyes so tenderly deceived.

In the old-fashioned market town still the business goes on, still the doors of the Bank open and close every moment on the great day of the week; but the names over the threshold are partially changed. The junior partner is busy no more at the desk; not wholly forgotten — if his name still is spoken, it is not with thankfulness and praise. A something rests on the name — that something which dims and attaints — not proven, not certain, but suspected and dubious. The head shakes, the voice whispers, — and the attorney now lives in the solid red house at the verge of the town.

In the vicarage, Time, the old scythe-bearer, has not paused from his work. Still employed on Greek texts, little changed,

save that his hair is gray, and that some lines in his kindly face tell of sorrows as of years, the Vicar sits in his parlour, but the children no longer, blithe-voiced and rose-cheeked, dart through the rustling espaliers. Those children, grave men, or staid matrons (save one whom Death chose, and therefore now of all best beloved!) are at their posts in the world. The young ones are flown from the nest, and, with anxious wings, here and there, search food in their turn for their young. But the blithe voice and rose-cheek of the child make not that loss which the hearth misses the most. From childhood to manhood, and from manhood to departure, the natural changes are gradual and prepared. The absence most missed is that household life which presided, which kept things in order, and must be coaxed if a chair were displaced. That providence in trifles, that clasp of small links, that dear, bustling agency — now pleased, now complaining — dear alike in each change of its humour; that active life which has no self of its own;—like the mind of a poet, though its prose be the humblest, transferring self into others, with its right to be cross, and its charter to scold; — for the motive is clear — it takes what it loves too anxiously to heart. The door of the parlour is open, the garden path still passes before the threshold; but no step now has full right to halt at the door, and interrupt the grave thought on Greek texts; — no small talk on details and wise savings chimes in with the wrath of *Medea*. The Prudent Genius is gone from the household; and perhaps as the good scholar now wearily pauses, and looks out on the silent garden, he would have given with joy all that Athens produced, from Æschylus to Plato, to hear again from the old familiar lips the lament on torn jackets, or the statistical economy of eggs!

But see, though the wife is no more, though the children have departed, the Vicar's home is not utterly desolate. See, along the same walk on which William soothed Susan's fears, and won her consent — see, what fairy advances? Is it Susan returned to

youth? How like! — yet, look again, and how unlike! The same, the pure, candid *regard* — the same, the clear, limpid blue of the eye — the same, that fair hue of the hair — light, but not auburn — more subdued, more harmonious than that equivocal colour which too nearly approaches to red. But how much more blooming and joyous than Susan's is that exquisite face in which all Hebe smiles forth — how much airier the tread, light with health — how much rounder, if slighter still, the wave of that undulating form! She smiles — her lips move — she is conversing with herself — she cannot be all silent, even when alone; for the sunny gladness of her nature must have vent like a bird's. But do not fancy that that gladness speaks the levity which comes from the absence of thought; it is rather from the depth of thought that it springs, as from the depth of a sea comes its music. See, as she pauses and listens, with her finger half raised to her lip, as amidst that careless jubilee of birds she hears a note more grave and sustained, the nightingale singing, by day, — (as sometimes, though rarely, he is heard — perhaps, because he misses his mate — perhaps, because he sees from his bower the creeping form of some foe to his race); — see, as she listens now to that plaintive, low-chanted warble, how quickly the smile is sobered, how the shade, soft and pensive, steals over the brow. It is but the mystic sympathy with Nature that gives the smile or the shade. In that heart lightly moved beats the fine sense of the poet. It is the exquisite sensibility of the nerves that gives its blithe play to those spirits, and from the clearness of the atmosphere comes, warm and ethereal, the ray of that light.

And does the roof of the pastor give shelter to Helen Mainwaring's youth? Has Death taken from her the natural protectors? Those forms which we saw so full of youth and youth's heart, in that very spot, — has the grave closed on them yet? *Yet!* — how few attain to the age of the Psalmist! Twenty-seven years have passed since that date — how often, in those years,

have the dark doors opened for the young as for the old! William Mainwaring died first, care-worn and shame-bowed: the blot on his name had cankered into his heart. Susan's life, always precarious, had struggled on, while he lived, by the strong power of affection and will;—she would not die, for who then could console him? but at his death the power gave way. She lingered, but lingered dyingly for three years; and then, for the first time since William's death, she smiled — that smile remained on the lips of the corpse. They had had many trials, that young couple whom we left so prosperous and happy! Not till many years after their marriage had one sweet consoler been born to them. In the season of poverty, and shame, and grief, it came; and there was no pride on Mainwaring's brow when they placed his first born in his arms. By her will, the widow consigned Helen to the joint guardianship of Mr. Fielden and her sister: but the latter was abroad, her address unknown, so the Vicar for two years had had sole charge of the orphan. She was not unprovided for. The sum that Susan brought to her husband, had been long since gone, it is true — lost in the calamity which had wrecked William Mainwaring's name and prospects — but Helen's grandfather, the land-agent, had died some time subsequent to that event, and, indeed, just before William's death. He had never forgiven his son the stain on his name — never assisted, never even seen him since that fatal day — but he left to Helen a sum of about 8000*l*., — for she, at least, was innocent. In Mr. Fielden's eyes, Helen was therefore an heiress. And who amongst his small range of acquaintance was good enough for her, not only so richly portioned, but so lovely? — accomplished too, for her parents had of late years lived chiefly in France, and languages there are easily learned, and masters cheap; — Mr. Fielden knew but one, whom Providence had also consigned to his charge — the supposed son of his old pupil Ardworth; but though a tender affection existed between the two young persons,

it seemed too like that of brother and sister, to afford much ground for Mr. Fielden's anxiety or hope.

From his window the Vicar observed the still attitude of the young orphan for a few moments, then he pushed aside his books, rose, and approached her. At the sound of his tread, she woke from her reverie, and bounded lightly towards him.

"Ah, you would not see me before!" she said in a voice in which there was the slightest possible foreign accent, which betrayed the country in which her childhood had been passed — "I peeped in twice at the window. I wanted you so much, to walk to the village. But you will come now — will you not?" added the girl coaxingly, as she looked up at him under the shade of her straw hat.

"And what do you want in the village, my pretty Helen?"

"Why you know it is Fair day, and you promised Bessie that you would buy her a fairing — to say nothing of me."

"Very true, and I ought to look in; it will help to keep the poor people from drinking. A clergyman should mix with his parishioners in their holidays. We must not associate our office only with grief, and sickness, and preaching. We will go. And what fairing are you to have?"

"Oh, something very brilliant, I promise you! I have formed grand notions of a fair. I am sure it must be like the bazaars we read of last night, in that charming 'Tour in the East.'"

The Vicar smiled, half benignly, half anxiously. "My dear child, it is so like you to suppose a village fair must be an eastern bazaar. If you always thus judge of things by your fancy, how this sober world will deceive you, poor Helen!"

"It is not my fault — *ne me grondez pas*, *méchant*," answered Helen, hanging her head. "But come, Sir, allow, at least, that if I let my romance, as you call it, run away with me now and then, I can still content myself with the reality. What, you shake your head still! Don't you remember the sparrow?"

"Ha! ha! yes — the sparrow that the pedlar sold you for a goldfinch; and you were so proud of your purchase, and wondered so much why you could not coax the goldfinch to sing, till at last the paint wore away, and it was only a poor little sparrow!"

"Go on! Confess; did I fret, then? Was I not as pleased with my dear sparrow, as I should have been with the prettiest goldfinch that ever sang? Does not the sparrow follow me about, and nestle on my shoulder — dear little thing! And I was right after all; for if I had not fancied it a goldfinch, I should not have bought it, perhaps. But now I would not change it for a goldfinch — no, not even for that nightingale I heard just now. So let me still fancy the poor fair a bazaar; it is a double pleasure, first to fancy the bazaar, and then to be surprised at the fair."

"You argue well," said the Vicar, as they now entered the village. "I really think, in spite of all your turn for poetry, and Goldsmith, and Cowper, that you would take as kindly to mathematics as your cousin John Ardworth, poor lad!"

"Not if mathematics have made him so grave — and so churlish, I was going to say — but that word does him wrong. Dear cousin, so kind and so rough!"

"It is not mathematics that are to blame, if he is grave and absorbed," said the Vicar with a sigh; "it is the two cares that gnaw most — poverty and ambition."

"Nay, do not sigh: it must be such a pleasure to feel as he does, that one must triumph at last!"

"Umph! — John must have nearly reached London by this time," said Mr. Fielden, "for he is a stout walker, and this is the third day since he left us. Well, now that he is about fairly to be called to the bar, I hope that his fever will cool, and he will settle calmly to work. I have felt great pain for him during this last visit."

"Pain! But why?"

"My dear, do you remember what I read out to you both from Sir William Temple, the night before John left us?"

Helen put her hand to her brow, and with a readiness which showed a memory equally quick and retentive, replied, "Yes; was it not to this effect? I am not sure of the exact words — 'To have something we have not, and be something we are not, is the root of all evil.'"

"Well remembered, my darling!"

"Ah, but," said Helen, archly, "I remember too what my cousin replied — 'If Sir William Temple had practised his theory, he would not have been ambassador at the Hague, or —"

"Pshaw! the boy 's always ready enough with his answers," interrupted Mr. Fielden rather petulantly. "There 's the fair, my dear; more in your way, I see, than Sir William Temple's philosophy."

And Helen was right — the fair was no eastern bazaar: but how delighted that young, impressionable mind was, notwithstanding! The swings and the roundabouts, the shows, the booths, even down to the gilt gingerbread kings and queens. All minds genuinely poetical, are peculiarly susceptible to movement — that is, to the excitement of numbers. If the movement is sincerely joyous, as in the mirth of a village holiday, such a nature shares insensibly in the joy. But if the movement is a false and spurious gaiety, as in a state ball, where the impassive face and languid step are out of harmony with the evident object of the scene — then the nature we speak of, feels chilled and dejected. Hence it really is, that the more delicate and ideal order of minds soon grow inexpressibly weary of the hack routine of what are called fashionable pleasures. Hence the same person most alive to a dance on the green, would be without enjoyment at Almack's. It is not because one scene is a village green, and the other a room in King Street; nor is it because the actors in the one are of the humble, in the others of the noble class, but

simply because the enjoyment in the first is visible and hearty, because in the other it is a listless and melancholy pretence. Helen fancied it was the swings and the booths that gave her that innocent exhilaration — it was not so; it was the unconscious sympathy with the crowd around her. When the poetical nature quits its own dreams for the actual world, it enters, and transfuses itself into the hearts and humours of others. The two wings of that spirit which we call Genius, are reverie and sympathy. But poor little Helen had no idea that she had genius. Whether chasing the butterfly, or talking fond fancies to her birds, or whether with earnest, musing eyes, watching the stars come forth, and the dark pine trees gleam into silver; whether with airy day-dreams and credulous wonder poring over the magic tales of Mirglip or Aladdin, or whether spell-bound to awe by the solemn woes of *Lear*, or following the blind great bard into "the heaven of heavens, an earthly guest, to draw empyreal air," she obeyed but the honest and varying impulse in each change of her pliant mood; and would have ascribed with genuine humility to the vagaries of childhood, that prompt gathering of pleasure — that quick shifting sport of the fancy by which Nature binds to itself, in chains undulating as melody, the lively senses of genius.

While Helen, leaning on the Vicar's arm, thus surrendered herself to the innocent excitement of the moment, the Vicar himself smiled and nodded to his parishioners, or paused to exchange a friendly word or two, with the youngest or the eldest loiterers, (those two extremes of mortality which the Church so tenderly unites,) whom the scene drew to its tempting vortex, when a rough-haired lad, with a leather bag strapped across his waist, turned from one of the gingerbread booths, and touching his hat, said, "Please you, Sir, I was a-coming to your house with a letter."

The Vicar's correspondence was confined and rare, despite

his distant children, for letters but a few years ago were costly luxuries to persons of narrow income, and therefore the juvenile letter-carrier who plied between the Post town and the village, failed to excite in his breast that indignation for being an hour or more behind his time, which would have animated one to whom the Post brings the usual event of the day. He took the letter from the boy's hand, and paid for it with a thrifty sigh, as he glanced at a handwriting unfamiliar to him — perhaps from some clergyman poorer than himself. However, that was not the place to read letters, so he put the epistle in his pocket, until Helen, who watched his countenance to see when he grew tired of the scene, kindly proposed to return home. As they gained a stile half way, Mr. Fielden remembered his letter, took it forth, and put on his spectacles. Helen stooped over the bank to gather violets, the Vicar seated himself on the stile. As he again looked at the address, the handwriting, before unfamiliar, seemed to grow indistinctly on his recollection. That bold, firm hand — thin and fine as woman's, but large and regular as man's — was too peculiar to be forgotten. He uttered a brief exclamation of surprise and recognition, and hastily broke the seal. The contents ran thus: —

"Dear Sir,

"So many years have passed since any communication has taken place between us, that the name of Lucretia Dalibard will seem more strange to you than that of Lucretia Clavering. I have recently returned to England after long residence abroad. I perceive by my deceased sister's will that she has confided her only daughter to my guardianship, conjointly with yourself. I am anxious to participate in that tender charge. I am alone in the world — an habitual sufferer — afflicted with a partial paralysis that deprives me of the use of my limbs. In such circumstances, it is the more natural that I should turn to the only relative left

me. My journey to England has so exhausted my strength, and all movement is so painful, that I must request you to excuse me for not coming in person for my niece. Your benevolence, however, will, I am sure, prompt you to afford me the comfort of her society, as soon as you can contrive some suitable arrangement for her journey. Begging you to express to Helen, in my name, the assurance of such a welcome as is due from me to my sister's child, and waiting with great anxiety your reply,

"I am dear Sir, your very faithful servant,

"LUCRETIA DALIBARD."

"P. S. — I can scarcely venture to ask you to bring Helen yourself to town, but I should be glad if other inducements to take the journey afforded me the pleasure of seeing you once again. I am anxious, in addition to such details of my late sister as you may be enabled to give me, to learn something of the history of her connexion, Mr. Ardworth, in whom I felt much interested years ago, and who, I am recently informed, left an infant, his supposed son, under your care. So long absent from England, how much have I to learn, and how little the mere grave-stones tell us of the dead!"

While the Vicar is absorbed in this letter, equally unwelcome and unexpected, — while, unconscious as the daughter of Ceres gathering flowers when the Hell King drew near, of the change that awaited her and the grim presence that approached on her fate, — Helen bends still over the bank odorous with shrinking violets, we turn where the new generation equally invites our gaze, and make our first acquaintance with two persons connected with the progress of our tale.

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The britska stopped. The servant, who had been gradually accumulating present dust and future rheumatisms on the 'bad eminence' of a rumble-tumble, exposed to the nipping airs of an English sky, leapt to the ground, and opened the carriage door.

"This is the best place for the view, Sir — a little to the right."

Percival St. John threw aside his book, (a volume of Voyages,) whistled to a spaniel dozing by his side, and descended lightly. Light was the step of the young man, and merry was the bark of the dog, as it chased from the road the startled sparrow, rising high into the clear air — favourites of Nature both, man and dog!

You had but to glance at Percival St. John, to know at once that he was of the race that toils not; the assured step spoke confidence in the world's fair smile. No care for the morrow dimmed the bold eye and the radiant bloom.

About the middle height — his slight figure, yet undeveloped, seemed not to have attained to its full growth — the darkening down only just shaded a cheek somewhat sunburnt, though naturally fair, round which locks black as jet played sportively in the fresh air — about him altogether there was the inexpressible charm of happy youth. He scarcely looked sixteen, though above four years older; but for his firm though careless step, and the open fearlessness of his frank eye, you might have almost taken him for a girl in men's clothes, not from effeminacy of feature, but from the sparkling bloom of his youth, and from his unmistakable newness to the cares and sins of man. A more delightful vision of ingenuous boyhood opening into life, under happy auspices, never inspired with pleased yet melancholy interest the eye of half envious, half pitying age.

"And that," mused Percival St. John — "that is London! Oh, for the Diable Boiteux to unroof me those distant houses, and

show me the pleasures that lurk within! — Ah, what long letters I shall have to write home! — How the dear old Captain will laugh over them, and how my dear good mother will put down her work and sigh! Home! — Um, — I miss it already. How strange and grim, after all, the huge city seems!"

His glove fell to the ground, and his spaniel mumbled it into shreds. The young man laughed, and, throwing himself on the grass, played gaily with the dog.

"Fie, Beau, Sir, — fie; gloves are indigestible. Restrain your appetite, and we 'll lunch together at the Clarendon."

At this moment there arrived at the same patch of greensward a pedestrian some years older than Percival St. John — a tall, muscular, raw-boned, dust-covered, travel-stained pedestrian — one of your pedestrians in good earnest — no amateur in neat gambroon, manufactured by Inkson, who leaves his carriage behind him, and walks on with his fishing-rod by choice, but a sturdy wanderer, with thick shoes and strapless trousers, a threadbare coat and a knapsack at his back. Yet withal, the young man had the air of a gentleman; not gentleman as the word is understood in St. James's, the gentleman of the noble and idle class, but the gentleman as the title is accorded, by courtesy, to all to whom both education and the habit of mixing with educated persons gives a claim to the distinction and imparts an air of refinement. The new comer was strongly built, at once lean and large — far more strongly built than Percival St. John, but without his look of cheerful and comely health. His complexion had not the florid hues that should have accompanied that strength of body; it was pale, though not sickly; the expression grave, the lines deep, the face strongly marked. By his side trotted painfully a wiry, yellowish, foot-sore Scotch terrier. Beau sprang from his master's caress, cocked his handsome head on one side, and suspended in silent halt his right fore-paw. Percival cast over his left shoulder a careless glance at the in-

truder. The last heeded neither Beau nor Percival. He slipped his knapsack to the ground, and the Scotch terrier sank upon it, and curled himself up into a ball. The wayfarer folded his arms tightly upon his breast, heaved a short unquiet sigh, and cast over the giant city, from under deep-pent lowering brows, a look so earnest, so searching, so full of inexpressible, dogged, determined power, that Percival, roused out of his gay indifference, rose and regarded him with curious interest.

In the meanwhile Beau had very leisurely approached the bilious-looking terrier; and after walking three times round him, with a stare and a small sniff of superb impertinence, halted with great composure, and lifting his hind leg — O Beau, Beau, Beau! your historian blushes for your breeding, and, like Sterne's recording angel, drops a tear upon the stain which washes it from the register — but not, alas! from the back of the bilious terrier! The space around was wide, Beau. You had all the world to choose; why select so specially for insult the single spot on which reposed the worn-out and unoffending? O, dainty Beau! — O, dainty world! Own the truth both of ye. There is something irresistibly provocative of insult in the back of a shabby-looking dog!

The poor terrier, used to affronts, raised its heavy eyelids, and shot the gleam of just indignation from its dark eyes. But it neither stirred nor growled, and Beau, extremely pleased with his achievement, wagged his tail in triumph, and returned to his master — perhaps, in parliamentary phrase, to 'report proceedings, and ask leave to sit again.'

"I wonder," soliloquized Percival St. John, "what that poor fellow is thinking of; — perhaps he *is* poor, indeed! — no doubt of it, now I look again. And I so rich! I should like to — hem — let 's see what he 's made of."

Herewith Percival approached, and with all a boy's half bashful, half saucy frankness, said — "A fine prospect, Sir."

The pedestrian started, and threw a rapid glance over the brilliant figure that accosted him. Percival St. John was not to be abashed by stern looks; but that glance might have abashed many a more experienced man. The glance of a squire upon a corn law missionary, of á Crockford dandy upon a Regent Street tiger, could not have been more disdainful.

"Tush!" said the pedestrian, rudely, and turned upon his heel.

Percival coloured, and, shall we own it? was boy enough to double his fist. Little would he have been deterred by the brawn of those great arms and the girth of that Herculean chest, if he had been quite sure that it was a proper thing to resent pugilistically so discourteous a monosyllable. The "tush!" stuck greatly in his throat. But the man, now removed to the farther verge of the hill, looked so tranquil and so lost in thought, that the short-lived anger died.

"And after all, if I was as poor as he looks, I dare say I should be just as proud," muttered Percival. "However, it 's his own fault if he goes to London on foot, when I might, at least, have given him a lift. Come, Beau, Sir."

With his face still a little flushed, and his hat, unconsciously, cocked fiercely on one side, Percival sauntered back to his britska.

As in a whirl of dust, the light carriage was borne by the four posters down the hill, the pedestrian turned for an instant from the view before to the cloud behind, and muttered — "Ay, a fine prospect for the rich — a noble field for the poor!" The tone in which those words were said told volumes; there, spoke the pride, the hope, the energy, the ambition, which make youth laborious, manhood prosperous, age renowned.

The stranger then threw himself on the sward, and continued his silent and intent contemplation till the clouds grew red in the

west. When, then, he rose, his eye was bright, his mien erect, and a smile, playing round his firm, full lips, stole the moody sternness from his hard face. Throwing his knapsack once more on his back, John Ardworth went resolutely on to the great vortex.

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

THE CORONATION.

The eighth of September, 1831, was a holiday in London. William the Fourth received the crown of his ancestors in that mighty church, in which the most impressive monitors to human pomp are the monuments of the dead: the dust of conquerors and statesmen, of the wise heads and the bold hands that had guarded the thrones of departed kings, slept around; and the great men of the Modern time were assembled in homage to the monarch, to whom the prowess and the liberty of generations had bequeathed an empire in which the sun never sets. In the Abbey — thinking little of the past, caring little for the future — the immense audience gazed eagerly on the pageant that occurs but once in that division of history — the lifetime of a king. The assemblage was brilliant and imposing. The galleries sparkled with the gems of women who still upheld the celebrity for form and feature, which, from the remotest times, has been awarded to the great English race. Below, in their robes and coronets, were men who neither in the senate nor the field have shamed their fathers. Conspicuous amongst all, for grandeur of mien and stature, towered the brothers of the king; while commanding yet more the universal gaze, were seen, here the eagle features of the old hero of Waterloo, and there the majestic brow of

the haughty statesman who was leading the people (while the last of the Bourbons, whom Waterloo had restored to the Tuileries, had left the orb and purple to the kindred house, so fatal to his name,) through a stormy and perilous transition to a bloodless revolution and a new charter.

Tier upon tier, in the division set apart for them, the members of the Lower House moved and murmured above the pageant; and the coronation of the new sovereign was connected in their minds with the great measure, which, still undecided, made at that time, a link between the People and the King; and arrayed against both, if not, indeed, the real Aristocracy, at least the Chamber recognised by the Constitution as its representative. Without the space, was one dense mass. Houses, from balcony to balcony, window to window, were filled as some immense theatre. Up, through the long thoroughfare to Whitehall, the eye saw that audience — A PEOPLE; and the gaze was bounded at the spot where Charles the First had passed from the banquet-house to the scaffold.

The ceremony was over; the procession had swept slowly by; the last huzza had died away. And, after staring awhile upon Orator Hunt, who had clambered up the iron palisade near Westminster Hall, to exhibit his goodly person in his court attire; the serried crowds hurrying from the shower which then unseasonably descended, broke into large masses or lengthening columns.

In that part of London which may be said to form a boundary between its old and its new world, by which, on the one hand, you pass to Westminster, or through that gorge of the Strand which leads along endless rows of shops that have grown up on the sites of the ancient halls of the Salisburys and the Exeters, the Buckinghams and Southamptons, to the heart of the City, built around the primeval palace of the "Tower," — while, on the other hand, you pass into the new city of aristocracy and

letters, of art and fashion, embracing the whilom chase of Marylebone, and the once sedge-grown waters of Pimlico; — by this ignoble boundary, (the crossing from the Opera House, at the bottom of the Haymarket to the commencement of Charing Cross,) stood a person whose discontented countenance was in singular contrast with the general gaiety and animation of the day. This person, O gentle reader — this sour, querulous, discontented person — was a king, too, in his own walk! None might dispute it. He feared no rebel; he was harassed by no reform; he ruled without ministers. Tools he had; but, when worn out, he replaced them without a pension or a sigh. He lived by taxes — but they were voluntary; and his Civil List was supplied, without demand for the redress of grievances. This person, nevertheless — not deposed, was suspended from his empire for the day. He was pushed aside; he was forgotten. He was not distinct from the crowd. Like Titus, he had lost a day — his vocation was gone. This person was the Sweeper of the Crossing!

He was a character! He was young, in the fairest prime of youth; but it was the face of an old man on young shoulders. His hair was long, thin, and prematurely streaked with gray; his face was pale, and deeply furrowed; his eyes hollow, and their stare gleamed, cold and stolid, under his bent and shaggy brows. The figure was at once fragile and ungainly — and the narrow shoulders curved in a perpetual stoop. It was a person once noticed that you would easily remember, and associate with some undefined, painful impression. The manner was humble, but not meek; the voice was whining, but without pathos. There was a meagre, passionless, dulness about the aspect, though, at times, it quickened into a kind of avid acuteness. No one knew by what human parentage this personage came into the world. He had been reared by the charity of a stranger, crept through childhood, and misery, and rags mysteriously; and

suddenly succeeded an old defunct negro in the profitable crossing whereat he is now standing. All education was unknown to him, so was all love. In those festive haunts at St. Giles's, where he who would see 'Life in London' may often discover the boy who has held his horse in the morning, dancing merrily with his chosen damsel at night, our sweeper's character was austere as Charles the Twelfth's! And, the poor creature had his good qualities! He was sensitively alive to kindness — little enough had been shown him to make the luxury the more prized from its rarity! — though fond of money, he would part with it (we do not say cheerfully, but part with it still) not to mere want, indeed (for he had been too pinched and starved himself, and had grown too obtuse to pinching and to starving for the sensitiveness that prompts to charity), but to any of his companions who had done him a good service, or who had even warmed his dull heart by a friendly smile; he was honest, too — honest to the backbone. You might have trusted him with gold untold. Through the heavy clod which man's care had not moulded, nor books enlightened, nor the priest's solemn lore informed, still natural rays from the great parent source of Deity struggled, fitful and dim. He had no lawful name; none knew if sponsors had ever stood security for his sins at the sacred fount. But he had christened himself by the strange, unchristianlike name of "Beck." There he was, then, seemingly without origin, parentage, or kindred tie — a lonesome, squalid, bloodless thing, which the great monster, London, seemed to have spawned forth of its own self — one of its sickly, miserable, rickety offspring, whom it puts out at nurse to Penury, at school to Starvation, and, finally, and literally gives them stones for bread, with the option of the gallows or the dunghill, when the desperate offspring calls on the giant mother for return and home!

And this creature did love something — loved, perhaps, some fellow-being — of that hereafter, when we dive into the secrets

of his privacy. Meanwhile, openly and frankly, he loved his crossing; he was proud of his crossing; he was grateful to his crossing. God help thee, son of the street, why not! He had in it a double affection; that of serving and being served. He kept the crossing — if the crossing kept him. He smiled at times to himself when he saw it lie fair and brilliant amidst the mire around; it bestowed on him a sense of property! What a man may feel for a fine estate in a ring fence, Beck felt for that isthmus of the kennel which was subject to his broom! The Coronation had made one rebellious spirit, when it swept the sweeper from his crossing.

He stood then half under the Colonnade of the Opera House, as the crowd now rapidly grew thinner and more scattered: and when the last carriage of a long string of vehicles had passed by, he muttered audibly —

"It 'll take a deal of pains to make she right agin!"

"So you be 's ere to-day, Beck!" said a ragamuffin boy, who, pushing and scrambling through his betters, now halted, and wiped his forehead as he looked at the sweeper. "Vy, ve are all out pleasuring. Vy vont you come with ve? — lots of fun!"

The sweeper scowled at the urchin, and made no answer, but began sedulously to apply himself to the crossing.

"Vy, there isn't another sweep in the streets, Beck. His Majesty King Bill's Currynation makes all on us so appy!"

"It has made *she* unkimmon dirty!" returned Beck, pointing to the dingy crossing, scarce distinguished from the rest of the road.

The ragamuffin laughed.

"But ve be 's a goin' to ave Reform now, Beck. The peopul's to have their rights and libties, hand the luds is to be put down, hand beefsteaks is to be a penny a pound, and —"

"What good will that do to she?"

"Vy, man, ve shall take turn about, and sum vun helse will sveep the crossings, and ve shall ride in sum vun helse's coach and four prads — cos vy? ve shall hall be hequals!"

"Hequals! I tells you vot, if you keeps jawing there, atween me and she, I shall vop you, Joe — cos vy — I be 's the biggest!" was the answer of Beck the sweeper to Joe the ragamuffin.

The jovial Joe laughed aloud, snapped his fingers, threw up his ragged cap with a shout for King Bill, and set off scampering and whooping to join those festivities which Beck had so churlishly disdained.

Time crept on — evening began to close in, and Beck was still at his crossing, when a young gentleman on horseback, who, after seeing the procession, had stolen away for a quiet ride in the suburbs, reined in close by the crossing, and, looking round, as for some one to hold his horse, could discover no loiterer worthy that honour except the solitary Beck. So young was the rider, that he seemed still a boy. On his smooth countenance, all that most prepossesses in early youth left its witching stamp. A smile, at once gay and sweet, played on his lips. There was a charm, even in a certain impatient petulance, in his quick eye, and the slight contraction of his delicate brows. Almaviva might well have been jealous of such a page! He was the *beau ideal* of Cherubino. He held up his whip, with an arch sign, to the sweeper. "Follow, my man," he said in a tone, the very command of which sounded gentle, so blithe was the movement of the lips, and so silvery the easy accent; and, without waiting, he cantered carelessly down Pall Mall.

The sweeper cast a rueful glance at his melancholy domain. But he had gained but little that day, and the offer was too tempting to be rejected. He heaved a sigh, shouldered his broom, and murmuring to himself that he would give her a last brush before he retired for the night, he put his long limbs into that swinging, shambling trot, which characterizes the motion of

those professional jackals, who having once caught sight of a groomless rider, fairly hunt him down, and appear when he least expects it, the instant he dismounts.

The young rider lightly swung himself from his sleek, high-bred gray, at the door of one of the clubs in St. James's Street, patted his horse's neck, chucked the rein to the sweeper, and sauntered into the house, whistling, musically — if not from want of thought, certainly from want of care.

As he entered the club, two or three men, young, indeed, but much older, to appearance, at least, than himself, who were dining together at the same table, nodded to him their friendly greeting.

"Ah, Perce," said one, "we have only just sat down — here is a seat for you."

The boy blushed shyly, as he accepted the proposal, and the young men made room for him at the table, with a smiling alacrity which showed that his shyness was no hindrance to his popularity."

"Who," said an elderly dandy, dining apart with one of his contemporaries — "who is that lad? One ought not to admit such mere boys into the club."

"He is the only surviving son of an old friend of ours," answered the other, dropping his eye-glass. "Young Percival St. John."

"St. John! What! Vernon St. John's son?"

"Yes."

"He has not his father's good air. These young fellows have a tone — a something — a want of self-possession, eh?"

"Very true. The fact is, that Percival was meant for the navy, and even served as a mid. for a year or so. He was a younger son, then — third, I think. The two elder ones died, and Master Percival walked into the inheritance. I don't think he is quite of age yet."

"Of age! he does not look seventeen!"

"Oh; he is more than that! I remember him in his jacket at Laughton. A fine property!"

"Ay, I don't wonder those fellows are so civil to him. This claret is corked! — everything is so bad at this d—d club! — no wonder, when a troop of boys are let in! — enough to spoil any club! — don't know Larose from Lafitte. Waiter!"

Meanwhile, the talk round the table, at which sate Percival St. John, was animated, lively, and various — the talk common with young idlers; of horses, and steeple-chases, and opera-dancers, and reigning beauties, and good-humoured jests at each other. In all this babble, there was a *naïve* freshness about Percival St. John's conversation, which showed that, as yet, for him life had the zest of novelty. He was more at home about horses and steeple-chases, than about opera-dancers, and beauties, and the small scandals of town. Talk on these latter topics did not seem to interest him; on the contrary, almost to pain. Shy and modest as a girl, he coloured or looked aside when his more hardened friends boasted of assignations and love-affairs. Spirited, gay, and manly enough in all really manly points, the virgin bloom of innocence was yet visible in his frank charming manner. And often, out of respect for his delicacy, some hearty son of pleasure stopped short in his narrative, or lost the point of his anecdote; and yet so loveable was Percival in his good-humour, his *naïveté*, his joyous entrance into innocent joy, that his companions were scarcely conscious of the *gêne* and restraint he imposed on them. Those merry, dark eyes, and that flashing smile, were conviviality of themselves. They brought with them a contagious cheerfulness, which compensated for the want of corruption.

Night had set in. St. John's companions had departed to their several haunts, and Percival himself stood on the steps of the club, resolving that he would join the crowds that swept

through the streets to gaze on the illuminations, when he perceived Beck, (still at the rein of his dozing horse,) whom he had quite forgot till that moment. Laughing at his own want of memory, Percival put some silver into Beck's hand — more silver than Beck had ever before received for similar service — and said:

"Well, my man, I suppose I can trust you to take my horse to his stables — No. —, the Mews, behind Curzon Street. Poor fellow, he wants his supper, — and you, too, I suppose!"

Beck smiled — a pale, hungry smile, and pulled his forelock politely — "I can take the oss werry safely, your onor."

"Take him, then, and good evening; but don't get on, for your life."

"Oh, no, Sir; I never gets on: 'taint in my vays."

And Beck slowly led the horse through the crowd, till he vanished from Percival's eyes.

Just then, a man passing through the street, paused, as he saw the young gentleman on the steps of the club, and said, gaily, "Ah! how do you do? Pretty faces in plenty out to-night! Which way are you going?"

"That is more than I can tell you, Mr. Varney. I was just thinking which turn to take — the right or the left."

"Then let me be your guide," and Varney offered his arm.

Percival accepted the courtesy; and the two walked on towards Piccadilly. Many a kind glance from the milliners and maid-servants, whom the illuminations drew abroad, roved, somewhat impartially, towards St. John and his companion; but they dwelt longer on the last, for *there*, at least, they were sure of a return. Varney, if not in his first youth, was still in the prime of life; and Time had dealt with him so leniently, that he retained all the personal advantages of youth itself. His complexion still was clear; and as only his upper lip, decorated with a slight, silken, and well-trimmed moustache, was unshaven,

the contour of the face, added to the juvenility of his appearance by the rounded symmetry it betrayed. His hair escaped from his hat in fair unchanged luxuriance. And the nervous figure, agile as a panther's, though broad-shouldered and deep-chested, denoted all the slightness and elasticity of twenty-five, combined with the muscular power of forty. His dress was rather fantastic — too showy for the good taste which is habitual to the English gentleman — and there was a peculiarity in his gait almost approaching to a strut, which bespoke a desire of effect — a consciousness of personal advantages — equally opposed to the mien and manner of Percival's usual companions; yet withal, even the most fastidious would have hesitated to apply to Gabriel Varney the epithet of 'vulgar'. Many turned to look again; but it was not to remark the dress, or the slight swagger: — an expression of reckless, sinister power in the countenance — something of vigour and determination even in that very walk, foppish as it would have been in most, made you sink all observation of the mere externals, in a sentiment of curiosity towards the man himself. He seemed a somebody — not a somebody of conventional rank, but a somebody of personal individuality — an artist perhaps, a poet, or a soldier in some foreign service, but certainly a man whose name you would expect to have heard of. Amongst the common mob of passengers he stood out in marked and distinct relief.

"I feel at home in a crowd," said Varney. "Do you understand me?"

"I think so," answered Percival. "If ever I could become distinguished, I, too, should feel at home in a crowd."

"You have ambition, then? you mean to become distinguished?" asked Varney, with a sharp, searching look.

There was a deeper and steadier flash than usual from Percival's dark eyes, and a manlier glow over his cheek, at Varney's question. But he was slow in answering; and when he did so,

his manner had all its wonted mixture of graceful bashfulness and gay candour.

"Our rise does not always depend on ourselves. We are not all born great, nor do we all have 'greatness thrust on us.' Shakespeare — hem!"

"One can be what one likes, with your fortune," said Varney; and there was a growl of envy in his voice.

"What, a painter like you! Ha, ha!"

"Faith," said Varney, "at least, if you could paint at all, you would have what I have not — praise and fame."

Percival pressed kindly on Varney's arm. "Courage! you will get justice some day!"

Varney shook his head. "Bah! there is no such thing as justice; all are underrated or overrated. Can you name one man whom you think is estimated by the public at his precise value? As for present popularity, it depends on two qualities — each singly, or both united — cowardice and charlatanism; that is, servile compliance with the taste and opinion of the moment, or a quack's spasmodic efforts at originality. But why bore you on such matters! There are things more attractive round us. A good ancle that, eh? Why, pardon me, it is strange; but you don't seem to care much for women?"

"Oh, yes, I do," said Percival, with a sly demureness. "I am very fond of — my mother!"

"Very proper and filial," said Varney, laughing, "and does your love for the sex stop there?"

"Well, and in truth I fancy so — pretty nearly. You know my grandmother is not alive! But *that* is something really worth looking at!" And Percival pointed, almost with a child's delight, at an illumination more brilliant than the rest.

"I suppose, when you come of age, you will have all the cedars at Laughton hung with coloured lamps. Ah, you must

ask me there, some day. I should so like to see the old place again."

"You never saw it, I think you say, in my poor father's time?"

"Never."

"Yet you knew him."

"But slightly."

"And you never saw my mother?"

"No; but she seems to have such influence over you, that I am sure she must be a very superior person — rather proud, I suppose."

"Proud — no; that is, not exactly proud, for she is very meek and very affable. But yet —"

"But yet — you hesitate — she would not like you to be seen, perhaps, walking in Piccadilly with Gabriel Varney, the natural son of old Sir Miles's librarian, — Gabriel Varney the painter — Gabriel Varney the adventurer!"

"As long as Gabriel Varney is a man without stain on his character and honour, my mother would only be pleased that I should know an able and accomplished person, whatever his origin or parentage. But my mother would be sad if she knew me intimate with a Bourbon or a Raffaelle, the first in rank or the first in genius, if either prince or artist had lost or even sullied his 'scutcheon of gentleman. In a word, she is most sensitive as to honour and conscience — all else she disregards."

"Hem!" Varney stooped down, as if examining the polish of his boot, while he continued, carelessly — "Impossible to walk the streets and keep one's boots out of the mire! Well — and you agree with your mother?"

"It would be strange if I did not. When I was scarcely four years old, my poor father used to lead me through the long picture-gallery at Laughton, and say, 'Walk through life as if those brave gentlemen looked down on you.' And," added St. John,

with his ingenuous smile — "my mother would put in her word— 'And those unstained women, too, my Percival!' "

There was something noble and touching in the boy's low accents as he said this; it gave the key to his unusual modesty, and his frank, healthful innocence of character.

The devil in Varney's lip sneered mockingly.

"My young friend, you have never loved yet. — Do you think you ever shall?"

"I have dreamed that I could love one day. But I can wait."

Varney was about to reply, when he was accosted abruptly by three men of that exaggerated style of dress and manner, which is implied by the vulgar appellation of 'Tigrish.' Each of the three men had a cigar in his mouth — each seemed flushed with wine. One wore long brass spurs, and immense moustaches; another was distinguished by an enormous surface of black satin cravat, across which meandered a Pactolus of gold chain; a third had his coat laced and braided, *à la Polonaise*, and pinched and padded *à la Russe*, with trousers shaped to the calf of a sinewy leg, and a glass screwed into his right eye."

"Ah, Gabriel! — ah, Varney! — ah, prince of good fellows, well met! You sup with us to-night at little *Celeste's* — we were just going in search of you."

"Who 's your friend — one of us?" whispered a second.

And the third screwed his arm tight and lovingly into Varney's.

Gabriel, despite his habitual assurance, looked abashed for a moment, and would have extricated himself from cordialities not at that moment welcome; but he saw that his friends were too far gone in their cups to be easily shaken off, and he felt relieved when Percival, after a dissatisfied glance at the three, said, quietly — "I must detain you no longer — I shall soon look in at your studio;" and, without waiting for answer, slid off, and was lost among the crowd.

Varney walked on with his new-found friends, unheeding for some moments their loose remarks and familiar banter. At length he shook off his abstraction, and surrendering himself to the coarse humours of his companions, soon eclipsed them all by the gusto of his slang and the mocking profligacy of his sentiments; for here he no longer played a part, or suppressed his grosser instincts. That uncurbed dominion of the senses, to which his very boyhood had abandoned itself, found a willing slave in the man. Even the talents themselves that he displayed came from the cultivation of the sensual. His eye, studying externals, made him a painter — his ear, quick and practised, a musician. His wild, prodigal fancy rioted on every excitement, and brought him in a vast harvest of experience in knowledge of the frailties and the vices on which it indulged its vagrant experiments. Men who over-cultivate the art that connects itself with the senses, with little counterpoise from the reason and pure intellect, are apt to be dissipated and irregular in their lives. This is frequently noticeable in the biographies of musicians, singers and painters, less so in poets, because he who deals with words, not signs, and tones, must perpetually compare his senses with the pure images of which the senses only see the appearances; in a word, he must employ his intellect, and his self-education must be large and comprehensive. But with most real genius, however fed merely by the senses — most really great painters, singers, and musicians, however easily led astray into temptation, the richness of the soil throws up abundant good qualities to countervail or redeem the evil — they are usually compassionate, generous, sympathizing. That Varney had not such beauties of soul and temperament it is unnecessary to add — principally, it is true, because of his nurture, education, parental example, the utter corruption in which his childhood and youth had passed—partly because he had no *real* genius: it was a false apparition of the divine spirit, reflected from the exquisite per-

fection of his frame, (which rendered all his senses so vigorous and acute,) and his riotous fancy, and his fitful energy, which was capable at times of great application, but not of definite purpose or earnest study. All about him was flashy and hollow. He had not the natural subtlety and depth of mind that had characterized his terrible father. The graft of the opera dancer was visible on the stock of the scholar: wholly without the habits of method and order, without the patience, without the mathematical, calculating brain of Dalibard, he played wantonly with the horrible and loathsome wickedness of which Olivier had made dark and solemn study. Extravagant and lavish, he spent money as fast as he gained it; he threw away all chances of eminence and career. In the midst of the direst plots of his villany, or the most energetic pursuit of his art, the poorest excitement, the veriest bauble would draw him aside. His heart was with Falri in the sty, his fancy with Aladdin in the palace. To make a show was his darling object: he loved to create effect by his person, his talk, his dress, as well as by his talents. Living from hand to mouth, crimes through which it is not our intention to follow him, had at times made him rich to-day, for vices to make him poor again to-morrow. What he called 'luck,' or 'his star,' had favoured him — he *was not hanged!* — he lived; and, as the greater part of his unscrupulous career had been conducted in foreign lands, and under other names, — in his own name, and in his own country, though something scarcely to be defined, but equivocal and provocative of suspicion, made him displeasing to the prudent, and vaguely alarmed the experience of the sober, — still no positive accusation was attached to the general integrity of his character; and the mere dissipation of his habits was naturally little known out of his familiar circle. Hence, he had the most presumptuous confidence in himself — a confidence native to his courage, and confirmed by his experience. His conscience was so utterly obtuse, that he might almost be said to

present the phenomenon of a man without conscience at all. Unlike Conrad, he did not "know himself a villain;" all that he knew of himself was, that he was a remarkably clever fellow, without prejudice or superstition. That, with all his gifts, he had not succeeded better in life, he ascribed carelessly to the surpassing wisdom of his philosophy. He could have done better if he had enjoyed himself less — but was not enjoyment the be all and end all of this little life? More often, indeed, in the moods of his bitter envy, he would lay the fault upon the world. How great he could have been if he had been rich and high born! Oh, he was made to spend, not to save — to command, not to fawn! He was not formed to plod through the dull mediocrities of fortune; he must toss up for the All or the Nothing! It was no control over himself that made Varney now turn his thoughts from certain grave designs on Percival Saint John, to the brutal debauchery of his three companions, — rather he then yielded most to his natural self. And when the morning star rose over the night he passed with low profligates and venal nymphs, — when, over the fragments on the board and emptied bottles, and drunken riot, dawn gleamed and saw him in all the pride of his magnificent organization, and the cynicism of his measured vice; — fair, fresh, and blooming amidst those maudlin eyes, and flushed cheeks, and reeling figures; — laughing hideously over the spectacle he had provoked, and kicking aside, with a devil's scorn, the prostrate form of the favoured partner whose head had rested on his bosom, as alone with a steady step he passed the threshold, and walked into the fresh, healthful air; — Gabriel Varney enjoyed the fell triumph of his hell-born vanity, and revelled in his sentiment of superiority and power.

Meanwhile, on quitting Varney, young Percival strolled on as the whim directed him. Turning down the Haymarket, he gained the colonnade of the Opera House. The crowd there was so dense that his footsteps were arrested, and he leant against

one of the columns in admiration of the various galaxies in view. In front blazed the rival stars of the United Service Club and the Athenæum; — to the left, the quaint and peculiar device which lighted up Northumberland House; — to the right, the anchors, cannons, and bombs, which typified ingeniously the martial attributes of the Ordnance Office.

At that moment there were three persons connected with this narrative within a few feet of each other, distinguished from the multitude by the feelings with which each regarded the scene and felt the jostle of the crowd. Percival St. John, in whom the harmless sense of pleasure was yet vivid and unsatiated, caught from the assemblage only that physical hilarity which heightened his own spirits. If in a character as yet so undeveloped — to which the large passions and stern ends of life were as yet unknown — stirred some deeper and more musing thoughts and speculations, giving gravity to the habitual smile on his rosy lip, and steadying the play of his sparkling eyes, he would have been at a loss himself to explain the dim sentiment, and the vague desire.

Screened by anothor column from the pressure of the mob, with his arms folded on his breast, a man some few years older in point of time — many years older in point of character — gazed (with thoughts how turbulent — with ambition how profound!) upon the dense and dark masses that covered space and street far as the eye could reach. He, indeed, could not have said, with Varney, that he was "at home in a crowd." For a crowd did not fill him with the sense of his own individual being and importance, but grappled him to its mighty breast with the thousand tissues of a common destiny. Who shall explain and disentangle those high, and restless, aud interwoven emotions with which intellectual ambition, honourable and ardent, gazes upon that solemn thing with which, in which, for which it lives and labours — the Human Multitude? To that abstracted, solitary man, the

illumination, the festivity, the curiosity, the holiday, were nothing, or but as fleeting phantoms and vain seemings. In his heart's eye, he saw before him but the PEOPLE, the shadow of an everlasting audience — audience at once and judge.

And literally touching him as he stood, the ragged sweeper, who had returned in vain to devote a last care to his beloved charge, stood arrested with the rest, gazing joylessly on the blazing lamps, dead as the stones he heeded, to the young vivacity of the one man, the solemn visions of the other. So, O London, amidst the universal holiday to monarch and to mob, in those three souls lived the three elements, which, duly mingled and administered, make thy vice and thy virtue — thy glory and thy shame — thy labour and thy luxury; pervading the palace and the street — the hospital and the prison; — enjoyment, which is pleasure — energy, which is action — torpor, which is want!

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

SUDDENLY across the gaze of Percival St. John there flashed a face that woke him from his abstraction, as a light awakes the sleeper. It was as a recognition of something seen dimly before —a truth coming out from a dream. It was not the mere beauty of that face, (and beautiful it was,) that arrested his eye and made his heart beat more quickly — it was rather that nameless and inexplicable sympathy which constitutes love at first sight; — a sort of impulse and instinct common to the dullest as the quickest —the hardest reason as the liveliest fancy. Plain Cobbett, seeing before the cottage door, at her homeliest of house work, the girl of whom he said— "That girl should be my wife;" and Dante, first thrilled by the vision of Beatrice, are alike true types of a common experience: Whatever of love sinks the deepest is felt at first sight; it streams on us abrupt from the cloud — a lightning flash — a destiny revealed to us face to face.

Now, there was nothing poetical in the place or the circumstance, still less in the companionship in which this fair creature startled the virgin heart of that careless boy; she was leaning on the arm of a stout, rosy-faced matron in a puce-coloured gown, who was flanked on the other side by a very small, very spare man, with a very wee face, the lower part of which was enveloped in an immense belcher. Besides these two incumbrances, the stout lady contrived to carry in her hands an umbrella, a basket, and a pair of pattens.

In the midst of the strange, unfamiliar emotion which his eye

conveyed to his heart, Percival's ear was displeasingly jarred by the loud, bluff, hearty voice of the girl's female companion —

"Gracious me! if that is not John Ardworth; who 'd have thought it! Why, John — I say, John!" and lifting her umbrella horizontally, she poked aside two city clerks in front of her, wheeled round the little man on her left, upon whom the clerks simultaneously bestowed the appellation of "feller," and driving him, as being the sharpest and thinnest wedge at hand, through a dense knot of some half a dozen gapers, while following his involuntary progress she looked defiance on the malcontents, she succeeded in clearing her way to the spot where stood the young man she had discovered. The ambitious dreamer, for it was he, thus detected and disturbed, looked embarrassed for a moment, as the stout lady, touching him with the umbrella, said —

"Well, I declare, if this is not too bad! You sent word that you should not be able to come out with us to see the 'luminations, and here you are as large as life!"

"I did not think, at the moment you wrote to me, that —"

"Oh, stuff!" interrupted the stout woman, with a significant, good-humoured shake of her head, "I know what 's what; tell the truth, and shame the gentleman who objects to showing his feet. You are a wild fellow, John Ardworth — you are! you like looking after the pretty faces — you do — you do — ha, ha, ha! very natural! So did you once — did not you, Mr. Mivers — did not you, eh! men must be men — they always are men, and it 's my belief that men they always *will* be!"

With this sage conjecture into the future, the lady turned to Mr. Mivers, who, thus appealed to, extricated with some difficulty his chin from the folds of his belcher, and, putting up his small face, said, in a small voice — "Yes, I was a wild fellow once, but you have tamed me! — you have, Mrs. M."

And therewith the chin sunk again into the belcher, and the small voice died into a small sigh.

The stout lady glanced benignly at her spouse, and then resuming her address, to which Ardworth listened with a half frown and a half smile, observed, encouragingly —

"Yes, there's nothing like a lawful wife, to break a man in, as you will find some day. Howsomever, your time's not come for the Altar, so suppose you give Helen your arm, and come with us."

"Do," said Helen, in a sweet, coaxing voice.

Ardworth bent down his rough, earnest face to Helen's, and an evident pleasure relaxed its thoughtful lines. "I cannot resist you," he began, and then he paused and frowned. "Pish," he added, "I was talking folly; but what head would not you turn? Resist you I must, for I am on my way now to my drudgery. Ask me anything, some years hence, when I have time to be happy, and then see if I am the bear you now call me."

"Well," said Mrs. Mivers, emphatically, "are you coming, or are you not? Don't stand there, shilly-shally."

"Mrs. Mivers," returned Ardworth, with a kind of sly humour, "I am sure you would be very angry with your hushand's excellent shopmen, if that was the way they spoke to your customers. If some unhappy dropper-in — some lady who came to buy a yard or so of Irish, was suddenly dazzled, as I am, by a luxury wholly unforeseen and eagerly coveted — a splendid lace veil, or a ravishing cashmere, or whatever else you ladies desiderate, and while she was balancing between prudence and temptation, your foreman exclaimed — 'Don't stand shilly-shally,' — come, I put it to you."

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Mivers.

"Alas! unlike your imaginary customer — (I hope so, at east, for the sake of your till) — prudence gets the better of me;

unless," added Ardworth, irresolutely and glancing at Helen — "unless, indeed, you are not sufficiently protected, and —"

"Purtected!" exclaimed Mrs. Mivers, in an indignant tone of astonishment, and agitating the formidable umbrella, "as if I was not enough, with the help of this here domestic commodity, to purtect a dozen such. Purtected, indeed!"

"John is right, Mrs. M.; business is business," said Mr. Mivers. "Let us move on — we stop the way, and those idle lads are listening to us, and sniggering."

"Sniggering!" exclaimed the gentle helpmate; "I should like to see those who presume for to snigger," and as she spoke she threw a look of defiance around her. Then, having thus satisfied her resentment, she prepared to obey, as no doubt she always did, her lord and master. Suddenly, with a practised movement, she wheeled round Mr. Mivers, and taking care to protrude before him the sharp point of the umbrella, cut her way through the crowd like the scythed car of the ancient Britons, and was soon lost amidst the throng, although her way might be guessed by a slight ripple of peculiar agitation along the general stream, accompanied by a prolonged murmur of reproach or expostulation which gradually died in the distance.

Ardworth gazed after the fair form of Helen with a look of regret; and, when it vanished, — with a slight start and a suppressed sigh, he turned away, and with the long, steady stride of a strong man, cleared his path through the Strand, towards the printing office of a journal on which he was responsibly engaged.

But Percival, who had caught much of the conversation that took place so near him — Percival, happy child of idleness and whim, had no motive of labour and occupation to stay the free impulse of his heart, and his heart drew him on, with magnetic attraction, in the track of the first being that had ever touched the sweet instincts of youth.

Meanwhile Mrs. Mivers was destined to learn — though, perhaps, the lesson little availed her — that to get smoothly through this world it is necessary to be supple as well as strong; and though, up to a certain point, man or woman may force the way by poking umbrellas into people's ribs, and treading mercilessly upon people's toes, yet the endurance of ribs and toes has its appointed limits.

Helen, half terrified, also half amused by her companion's robust resolution of purpose, had in Mrs. Mivers's general courage and success that confidence which the weak repose in the strong, and though, whenever she turned her eyes from the illuminations, she besought Mrs. Mivers to be more gentle, yet, seeing that they had gone safely from St. Paul's to St. James's, she had no distinct apprehension of any practically ill results from the energies she was unable to mitigate. But now, having just gained the end of St. James's Street, Mrs. Mivers at last found her match. The crowd here halted, thick and serried, to gaze in peace upon the brilliant vista which the shops and clubs of that street presented. Coaches and carriages had paused in their line, and immediately before Mrs. Mivers stood three very thin, small women, whose dress bespoke them to be of the humblest class.

"Make way, there — make way, my good women, — make way!" cried Mrs. Mivers, equally disdainful of the size and the rank of the obstructing parties.

"Arrah, and what shall we make way for the like of you, you ould busy body?" said one of the dames, turning round, and presenting a very formidable squint to the broad optics of Mrs. Mivers.

Without deigning a reply, Mrs. Mivers had recourse to her usual tactics. Umbrella and husband went right between two of the feminine obstructives; and to the inconceivable astonishment and horror of the assailant, husband and umbrella instantly vanished. The three small furies had pounced upon both. They

were torn from their natural owner — they were hurried away; the stream behind, long fretted at the path so abruptly made amidst it, closed in, joyous with a thousand waves. Mrs. Mivers and Helen were borne forward in one way, the umbrella and the husband in the other: at the distance a small voice was heard — "Don't you! — don't! Be quiet! Mrs. — Mrs. — Mrs. M.! Oh! oh! Mrs. M.!" At that last repetition of the beloved and familiar initial, uttered in a tone of almost superhuman anguish, the conjugal heart of Mrs. Mivers was afflicted beyond control.

"Wait here a moment, my dear! I 'll just give it them — that's all!" And in another moment Mrs. Mivers was heard bustling, scolding, till all trace of her whereabout was gone from the eyes of Helen. Thus left alone, in exceeding shame and dismay, the poor girl cast a glance around. The glance was caught by two young men, whose station, in these days when dress is an equivocal designator of rank, could not be guessed by their exterior. They might be dandies from the west — they might be clerks from the east.

"By Jove," exclaimed one, "that 's a sweet pretty girl!" and, by a sudden movement of the crowd, they both found themselves close to Helen.

"Are you alone, my dear?" said a voice rudely familiar.

Helen made no reply — the tone of the voice frightened her. A gap in the mob showed the space towards Cleveland Row, which, leading to no illuminations, was vacant and solitary. She instantly made towards this spot; the two men followed her, — the bolder and elder one occasionally trying to catch hold of her arm. At last, as she passed the last house to the left, a house then owned by One who, at once far-sighted and impetuous, affable and haughty — characterized alike by solid virtues and brilliant faults — would, but for hollow friends, have triumphed over countless foes, and enjoyed at last that

brief day of stormy power for which statesmen resign the health of manhood and the hope of age — as she passed that memorable mansion, she suddenly perceived that the space before her had no thoroughfare, and, while she paused in dismay, her pursuers blockaded her escape.

One of them now fairly seized her hand: "Nay, pretty one, why so cruel? But one kiss — only one!" He endeavoured to pass his arm round her waist while he spoke. Helen eluded him, and darted forward, to find her way stopped by her persecutor's companion, when to her astonishment a third person gently pushed aside the form that impeded her path, approached, and looking mute defiance at the unchivalric molesters, offered her his arm. Helen gave but one timid hurrying glance to her unexpected protector: Something in his face, his air, his youth, appealed at once to her confidence. Mechanically, and scarce knowing what she did, she laid her trembling hand on the arm held out to her.

The two Lotharios looked foolish. One pulled up his shirt collar, the other turned, with a forced laugh, on his heel. Boy as Percival seemed, and little more than boy as he was, there was a dangerous fire in his eye, and an expression of spirit and ready courage in his whole countenance, which if it did not awe his tall rivals, made them at least unwilling to have a scene, and provoke the interference of the policemen, one of whom was now seen walking slowly up to the spot. They, therefore, preserved a discomfited silence; and Percival St. John, with his heart going ten knots a beat, sailed triumphantly off with his prize.

Scarcely knowing whither he went, certainly forgetful of Mr. Mivers, in his anxiety to escape at least from the crowd, Percival walked on till he found himself with his fair charge under the trees of St. James's Park.

Then Helen, recovering herself, paused, and said alarmed "But this is not my way — I must go back to the street!"

"How foolish I am — that is true!" said Percival, looking confused. "I — I felt so happy to be with you, feel your hand on my arm, and think that we were all by ourselves, that — that — but you have dropped your flowers!"

And as a bouquet Helen wore, dislodged somehow or other, fell to the ground, both stooped to pick it up, and their hands met. At that touch, Percival felt a strange tremble, which perhaps communicated itself (for such things are contagious) to his fair companion. Percival had got the nosegay, and seèmed willing to detain it, for he bent his face lingeringly over the flowers. At length, he turned his bright ingenuous eyes to Helen, and singling one rose from the rest, said beseechingly — "May I keep this? See, it is not so fresh as the others."

"I am sure, Sir," said Helen, colouring, and looking down, "I owe you so much that I should be glad if a poor flower could repay it."

"A poor flower! You don't know what a prize this is to me!"

Percival placed the rose reverently in his bosom, and the two moved back slowly, as if reluctant both, through the old palace court into the street.

"Is that lady related to you?" asked Percival, looking another way, and dreading the reply: "Not your mother, surely!"

"Oh, no! — I have no mother!"

"Forgive me!" said Percival, for the tone of Helen's voice told him that he had touched the spring of a household sorrow. "And," he added, with a jealousy that he could scarcely restrain from making itself evident in his accent, "that gentleman who spoke to you under the Colonnade, — I have seen him before, but where I cannot remember. In fact, you have put everything but yourself out of my head. Is he related to you?"

"He is my cousin."

"Cousin!" repeated Percival, pouting a little; and again there was silence.

"I don't know how it is," said Percival, at last, and very gravely, as if much perplexed by some abstruse thought, "but I feel as if I had known you all my life. I never felt this for any one before."

There was something so irresistibly innocent in the boy's serious, wondering tone, as he said these words, that a smile, in spite of herself, broke out amongst the thousand dimples round Helen's charming lips. Perhaps the little witch felt a touch of coquetry for the first time.

Percival, who was looking sidelong into her face, saw the smile, and said, drawing up his head, and shaking back his jetty curls, "I dare say you are laughing at me as a mere boy; but I am older than I look. I am sure I am much older than you are. Let me see, you are seventeen, I suppose?"

Helen, getting more and more at her ease, nodded playful assent.

"And I am not far from twenty-one. Ah! you may well look surprised — but so it is. An hour ago I felt a mere boy; now I shall never feel a boy again!"

Once more there was a long pause, and before it was broken they had gained the very spot in which Helen had lost her friend.

"Why, bless us, and save us!" exclaimed a voice 'loud as a trumpet,' but not 'with a silver sound,' "there you are, after all;" and Mrs. Mivers (husband and umbrella both regained) planted herself full before them.

"Oh, a pretty fright I have been in; and now to see you coming along as cool as if nothing had happened — as if the humbrella had not lost its hivory andle — it 's quite purvoking. Dear, dear! what we have gone through! And who is this young gentleman, pray?"

Helen whispered some hesitating explanation, which Mrs. Mivers did not seem to receive as graciously as Percival, poor fellow, had a right to expect. She stared him full in the face, and shook her head suspiciously when she saw him a little confused by the survey. Then, tucking Helen tightly under arm, she walked back towards the Haymarket, merely saying to Percival —

"Much obligated, and good night. I have a long journey to take to set down this here young lady, and the best thing we can all do is to get home as fast as we can, and have a refreshing cup of tea — that 's my mind, Sir. Excuse *me!*"

Thus abruptly dismissed, poor Percival gazed wistfully on his Helen, as she was borne along, and was somewhat comforted at seeing her look back, with (as he thought) a touch of regret in her parting smile. Then suddenly it flashed across him how sadly he had wasted his time. Novice that he was, he had not even learned the name and address of his new acquaintance. At that thought he hurried on through the crowd, but only reached the object of his pursuit just in time to see her placed in a coach, and to catch a full view of the luxuriant proportions of Mrs. Mivers as she followed her into the vehicle.

As the lumbering conveyance (the only coach on the stand) heaved itself into motion, Percival's eye fell on the sweeper, who was still leaning on his broom, and who in grateful recognition of the unwonted generosity that had repaid his service, touched his ragged hat, and smiled drowsily on his young customer. Love sharpens the wit, and animates the timid; — a thought, worthy of the most experienced, inspired Percival St. John: he hurried to the sweeper, laid his hand on his patchwork coat, and said, breathlessly —

"You see that coach turning into the square; follow it — find out where it sets down. There 's a sovereign for you — another

if you succeed. Call and tell me your success. Number — Curzon-street! — off, like a shot!"

The sweeper nodded and grinned; it was possibly not his first commission of a similar kind. He darted down the street; and Percival, following him with equal speed, had the satisfaction to see him, as the coach traversed St. James's-square, comfortably seated on the footboard.

He, dull clod, knew nothing, cared nothing, felt nothing as to the motives or purpose of his employer. Honest love or selfish vice, it was the same to him. He saw only the one sovereign which, with astounded eyes, he still gazed at on his palm, and the vision of the sovereign that was yet to come:

"Scandit æratas vitiosa naves,
Cura: nec turmas equitum relinquit."

It was the Selfishness of London — calm and stolid, whether on the track of innocence or at the command of guile.

At half-past ten o'clock, Percival St. John was seated in his room, and the sweeper stood at the threshold. Wealth and penury seemed brought into visible contact in the persons of the visitor and the host. The dwelling is held by some to give an index to the character of the owner; if so, Percival's apartments differed much from those generally favoured by young men of rank and fortune. On the one hand it had none of that affectation of superior taste, evinced in marqueterie and gilding, or the more picturesque discomfort of high-backed chairs and mediæval curiosities which prevails in the daintier abodes of fastidious bachelors. Nor, on the other hand, had it the sporting character which individualize the ruder juveniles '*qui gaudent equis*,' betrayed by engravings of racers, and celebrated fox-hunts, relieved, perhaps, if the Nimrod condescend to a cross of the Lovelace, with portraits of *figurantes*, and ideals of French sentiment, entitled, "*Le Soir*," or "*La Reveillée*,'

"*L'Espoir*," or "*L'Abandon*." But the rooms had a physiognomy of their own, from their exquisite neatness and cheerful simplicity. The chintz draperies were lively with gay flowers; books filled up the niches; here and there were small pictures, chiefly sea pieces — well chosen, well placed.

There might, indeed, have been something almost effeminate in a certain inexpressible purity of taste, and a cleanliness of detail that seemed actually brilliant, had not the folding-doors allowed a glimpse of a plainer apartment, with fencing foils and boxing-gloves ranged on the wall, and a cricket-bat resting carelessly in the corner. These gave a redeeming air of manliness to the rooms, but it was the manliness of a boy; half girl, if you please, in the purity of thought that pervaded one room, all boy in the playful pursuits that were made manifest in the other. Simple, however, as this abode really was, poor Beck had never been admitted to the sight of anything half so fine. He stood at the door for a moment, and stared about him, bewildered and dazzled. But his natural torpor to things that concerned him not, soon brought to him the same stoicism that philosophy gives the strong; and after the first surprise, his eye quietly settled on his employer. St. John rose eagerly from the sofa, on which he had been contemplating the starlit tree-tops of Chesterfield Gardens —

"Well, well," said Percival.

"*H*old Brompton," said Beck, with a brevity of word and clearness of perception worthy a Spartan.

"Old Brompton?" repeated Percival, thinking the reply the most natural in the world.

"In a big ous by hisself," continued Beck, "with a igh vall in front."

"You would know it again?"

"In course; he 's so wery pecular."

"He? who?"

"Vy, the ous. The young lady got out, and the *h*old folks driv back. I did not go arter *them!*" — and Beck looked sly.

"So; — I must find out the name."

"I axed at the public," said Beck, proud of his diplomacy. "They keeps a sarvant vot takes half a pint at her meals. The young lady's ma be a foriner."

"A foreigner! Then she lives there with her mother?"

"So they 'spose at the public."

"And the name?"

Beck shook his head. "'T is a French un, your onor; but the sarvant's is Martha."

"You must meet me at Brompton, near the turnpike, to-morrow, and show me the house."

"Vy, I 's in bizness all day, please your onor."

"In bizness?"

"I 's the place of the crossing," said Beck, with much dignity; "but arter eight I goes vhere I likes."

"To-morrow evening, then, at half-past eight, by the turnpike."

Beck pulled his forelock assentingly.

"There 's the sovereign I promised you, my poor fellow — much good may it do you. Perhaps you have some father or mother whose heart it will glad."

"I never had no such thing," replied Beck, turning the coin in his hand.

"Well, don't spend it in drink."

"I never drinks nothing but svipes."

"Then," said Percival, laughingly, "what, my good friend, will you ever do with your money?"

Beck put his finger to his nose, sunk his voice into a whisper and replied, solemnly — "I as a mattris."

"A mistress," said Percival; "oh, a sweetheart! Well;

but if she 's a good girl, and loves you, she won't let you spend your money on her."

"I haint such a ninny as that," said Beck, with majestic contempt. "I 'spises the flat that is done brown by the blowens. I as a mattris."

"A mattress! a mattress! Well, what has that to do with the money?"

"Vy, I lines it."

Percival looked puzzled. "Oh," said he, after a thoughtful pause, and in a tone of considerable compassion, "I understand; you sew your money in your mattress. My poor, poor lad, you can do better than that! — there are the savings banks."

Beck looked frightened: "I opes your 'onor vont tell no vun. I opes no vun vont go for to put my tin vere I shall know nothing vatsomever about it. Now, I knows vere it is — and I lays on it."

"Do you sleep more soundly when you lie on your treasure?"

"No; it 's hodd," said Beck, musingly, "but the more I lines it, the vorse I sleeps."

Percival laughed; but there was melancholy in his laughter; something in the forlorn, benighted, fatherless, squalid miser, went to the core of his open, generous heart.

"Do you ever read your Bible?" said he, after a pause; " — or even the newspaper?"

"I does not read nothing, cos vy, I haint been made a scholard, like swell Tim, as was lagged for a forgery."

"You go to church on a Sunday?"

"Yes; I 'as a veekly hingagement at the New Road."

"What do you mean?"

"To see arter the gig of a gemman vot comes from Ighgate."

Percival lifted his brilliant eyes, and they were moistened with a heavenly dew, on the dull face of his fellow-creature. Beck made a scrape, looked round, shambled back to the door, and ran home, through the lamp-lit streets of the great mart of the Christian universe, to sew the gold in his mattress.

CHAPTER III.

EARLY TRAINING FOR AN UPRIGHT GENTLEMAN.

PERCIVAL ST. JOHN had been brought up at home under the eye of his mother and the care of an excellent man, who had been tutor to himself and his brothers. The tutor was not much of a classical scholar, for, in great measure, he had educated himself; and he who does so, usually lacks the polish and brilliancy of one whose footsteps have been led early to the Temple of the Muses. In fact, Captain Greville was a gallant soldier, with whom Vernon St. John had been acquainted in his own brief military career, and whom circumstances had so reduced in life as to compel him to sell his commission, and live as he could. He had always been known in his regiment as a reading man, and his authority looked up to in all the disputes as to history and dates, and literary anecdotes, which might occur at the mess-table. Vernon considered him the most learned man of his acquaintance; and, when accidentally meeting him in London, he learned his fallen fortunes, he congratulated himself on a very brilliant idea, when he suggested that Captain Greville should assist him in the education of his boys and the management of his estate. At first, all that Greville modestly undertook, with respect to the former, and, indeed, was expected to do, was to prepare the young gentlemen for Eton, to which Vernon, with the natural predilection of an Eton man, destined his sons. But the sickly constitutions of the two elder justified Lady Mary in her opposition to a public school; and Percival conceived early so strong an affection for a sailor's life, that the father's intentions were frustrated. The two elder continued their education

at home; and Percival, at an earlier age than usual, went to sea. The last was fortunate enough to have for his captain one of that new race of naval officers who, well educated and accomplished, form a notable contrast to the old heroes of Smollet. Percival, however, had not been long in the service before the deaths of his two elder brothers, preceded by that of his father, made him the head of his ancient house, and the sole prop of his mother's earthly hopes. He conquered with a generous effort the passion for his noble profession, which service had but confirmed, and returned home with his fresh child-like nature uncorrupted, his constitution strengthened, his lively and impressionable mind braced by the experience of danger and the habits of duty, and quietly resumed his reading under Captain Greville, who had moved from the hall to a small house in the village.

Now, the education he had received, from first to last, was less adapted prematurely to quicken his intellect and excite his imagination than to warm his heart and elevate, while it chastened, his moral qualities; for in Lady Mary there was, amidst singular sweetness of temper, a high cast of character and thought. She was not what is commonly called clever, and her experience of the world was limited, compared to that of most women of similar rank who pass their lives in the vast theatre of London. But she became superior by a certain single-heartedness which made truth so habitual to her, that the light in which she lived rendered all objects around her clear. One who is always true, in the great duties of life is nearly always wise. And Vernon, when he had fairly buried his faults, had felt a noble shame for the excesses into which they had led him. Gradually more and more wedded to his home, he dropped his old companions. He set grave guard on his talk, (his *habits* now required no guard,) lest any of the ancient levity should taint the ears of his children. Nothing is more common in parents than their desire that their children should escape their faults. We

scarcely know ourselves till we have children, and then, if we love them duly, we look narrowly into failings that become vices, when they serve as examples to the young.

The inborn gentleman, with the native courage, and spirit, and horror of trick and falsehood which belong to that chivalrous abstraction, survived almost alone in Vernon St. John; and his boys sprang up in the atmosphere of generous sentiments and transparent truth. The tutor was in harmony with the parents — a soldier every inch of him — not a mere disciplinarian, yet with a profound sense of duty, and a knowledge that duty is to be found in attention to details. In inculcating the habit of subordination so graceful to the young, he knew how to make himself beloved, and, what is harder still, to be understood. The soul of this poor soldier was white and unstained, as the arms of a maiden knight; it was full of suppressed, but lofty enthusiasm. He had been ill-used, whether by Fate or the Horse Guards — his career had been a failure, but he was as loyal as if his hand held the field-marshal's truncheon and the garter bound his knee. He was above all querulous discontent. From him, no less than from his parents, Percival caught not only a spirit of honour worthy the *antiqua fides* of the poets, but that peculiar cleanliness of thought, if the expression may be used, which belongs to the ideal of youthful chivalry. In mere book-learning, Percival, as may be supposed, was not very extensively read; but his mind, if not largely stored, had a certain unity of culture which gave it stability and individualized its operations. Travels, voyages, narratives of heroic adventure, biographies of great men, had made the favourite pasture of his enthusiasm. To this was added the more stirring, and, perhaps, the more genuine order of poets who make you feel and glow, rather than doubt and ponder. He knew, at least, enough of Greek to enjoy old Homer; and if he could have come but ill through a college examination into Æschylus and Sophocles, he

had dwelt with fresh delight on the rushing storm of spears, in the *Seven before Thebes*, and wept over the heroic calamities of *Antigone*. In science, he was no adept; but his clear, good sense, and quick appreciation of positive truths, had led him easily through the elementary mathematics, and his somewhat martial spirit had made him delight in the old captain's lectures on military tactics. Had he remained in the navy, Percival St. John would, doubtless, have been distinguished. His talents fitted him for straightforward manly action; and he had a generous desire of distinction, vague, perhaps, the moment he was taken from his profession, and curbed by his diffidence in himself and his sense of deficiencies in the ordinary routine of purely classical education. Still he had in him all the elements of a true man — a man to go through life with a firm step and a clear conscience, and a gallant hope. Such a man may not win fame, *that* is an accident; but he must occupy no despicable place in the movement of the world.

It was at first intended to send Percival to Oxford, but for some reason or other, that design was abandoned. Perhaps Lady Mary, over-cautious, as mothers left alone sometimes are, — feared the contagion to which a young man of brilliant expectations, and no studious turn, is necessarily exposed in all places of miscellaneous resort. — So Percival was sent abroad for two years, under the guardianship of Captain Greville. On his return, at the age of nineteen — the great world lay before him, and he longed ardently to enter. For a year Lady Mary's fears and fond anxieties detained him at Laughton; but, though his great tenderness for his mother, withheld Percival from opposing her wishes by his own, this interval of inaction affected visibly his health and spirits. Captain Greville, a man of the world, saw the cause sooner than Lady Mary, and one morning, earlier than usual, he walked up to the Hall.

The captain, with all his deference to the sex, was a plain man

enough, when business was to be done. Like his great commander he came to the point in a few words.

"My dear Lady Mary, our boy must go to London — we are killing him here."

"Mr. Greville!" cried Lady Mary, turning pale and putting aside her embroidery — "killing him?"

"Killing the man in him. I don't mean to alarm you — I dare say his lungs are sound enough, and that his heart would bear the sthenoscope to the satisfaction of the College of Surgeons. But, my dear Ma'am, Percival is to be a man — it is the man you are killing by keeping him tied to your apron-string."

"Oh, Mr. Greville! I am sure you don't wish to wound me, but —"

"I beg ten thousand pardons. I am rough, but truth is rough sometimes."

"It is not for my sake," said the mother, warmly, and with tears in her eyes, "that I have wished him to be here. If he is dull, can we not fill the house for him?"

"Fill a thimble, my dear lady Mary — Percival should have a plunge in the ocean."

"But he is so young yet, that horrid London! -- such temptations — fatherless, too!"

"I have no fear of the result if Percival goes now while his principles are strong, and his imagination not inflamed; but if we keep him here much longer against his bent, he will learn to brood and to muse, write bad poetry perhaps, and think the world withheld from him a thousand times more delightful than it is. This very dread of temptation will provoke his curiosity, irritate his fancy, make him imagine the temptation must be a very delightful thing. For the first time in my life, Ma'am, I have caught him sighing over fashionable novels, and subscribing to the Southampton Circulating Library. Take my word for it,

it is time that Percival should begin life, and swim without corks."

Lady Mary had a profound confidence in Greville's judgment and affection for Percival, and like a sensible woman she was aware of her own weakness. She remained silent for a few moments, and then said, with an effort —

"You know how hateful London is to me now — how unfit I am to return to the hollow forms of its society; still, if you think it right, I will take a house for the season, and Percival can still be under our eye."

"No, Ma'am, pardon me, that will be the surest way to make him either discontented or hypocritical. A young man of his prospects and temper can hardly be expected to chime in with all our sober, old-fashioned habits. You will impose on him — if he is to conform to our hours, and notions, and quiet set — a thousand irksome restraints; and what will be the consequence? In a year, he will be of age, and can throw us off altogether, if he pleases. I know the boy: — don't seem to distrust him — he may be trusted. You place the true constraint on temptation, when you say to him, 'We confide to you our dearest treasure — your honour, your morals, your conscience, yourself!'"

"But, at least, you will go with him, if it must be so," said Lady Mary, after a few timid arguments, from which, one by one, she was driven.

"I! — what for? — to be a jest of the young puppies he must know — to make him ashamed of himself and me — himself as a milksop, and me as a dry nurse."

"But this was not so abroad!"

"Abroad, Ma'am, I gave him full swing, I promise you; and when we went abroad, he was two years younger."

"But he is a mere child, still."

"Child, Lady Mary! At his age, I had gone through two sieges. There are younger faces than his at a mess-room. Come,

come! I know what you fear — he may commit some follies; very likely. He may be taken in, and lose some money — he can afford it, and he will get experience in return. Vices he has none. I have seen him — ay, with the vicious. Send him out against the world, like a saint of old, with his Bible in his hand, and no spot on his robe. Let him see fairly what is, not stay here to dream of what is not. And when he 's of age, Ma'am, we must get him an object — a pursuit; — start him for the county, and make him serve the state; he will understand that business pretty well. Tush! tush! what is there to cry at?"

The captain prevailed. We don't say that his advice would have been equally judicious for all youths of Percival's age; but he knew well the nature to which he confided; he knew well how strong was that young heart in its healthful simplicity and instinctive rectitude; and he appreciated its manliness not too highly when he felt that all evident props and aids would be but irritating tokens of distrust.

And thus, armed only with letters of introduction, his mother's tearful admonitions, and Greville's experienced warnings, Percival St. John was launched into London life. After the first month or so, Greville came up to visit him, do him sundry kind invisible offices amongst his old friends, help him to equip his apartments, and mount his stud; and, wholly satisfied with the results of his experiment, returned in high spirits with flattering reports to the anxious mother.

But, indeed, the tone of Percival's letters would have been sufficient to allay even maternal anxiety. He did not write, as sons are too apt to do, short excuses for not writing more at length, unsatisfactory compressions of details, (exciting worlds of conjecture,) into a hurried sentence. Frank and overflowing, those delightful epistles gave accounts fresh from the first impressions of all he saw and did. There was a racy, wholesome gusto in his enjoyment of novelty and independence. His balls

and his dinners, and his cricket at *Lord's* — his partners, and his companions; his general gaiety, his occasional *ennui*, furnished ample materials to one who felt he was corresponding with another heart, and had nothing to fear or to conceal.

But about two months before this portion of our narrative opens with the coronation, Lady Mary's favourite sister, who had never married, and who, by the death of her parents, was left alone in the worse than widowhood of an old maid, had been ordered to Pisa, for a complaint that betrayed pulmonary symptoms; and Lady Mary, with her usual unselfishness, conquered both her aversion to movement and her wish to be in reach of her son, to accompany abroad this beloved and solitary relative. Captain Greville was pressed into service as their joint cavalier. And thus Percival's habitual intercourse with his two principal correspondents received a temporary check.

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN ARDWORTH.

At noon the next day, Beck, restored to his grandeur, was at the helm of his state; Percival was vainly trying to be amused by the talk of two or three loungers who did him the honour to smoke a cigar in his rooms; and John Ardworth sat in his dingy cell in Gray's Inn, with a pile of law books on the table, and the daily newspapers carpeting a footstool of *Hansard's Debates* upon the floor — no unusual combination of studies amongst the poorer and more ardent students of the law, who often owe their earliest, nor perhaps their least noble earnings, to employment in the empire of the Press. By the power of a mind habituated to labour, and backed by a frame of remarkable strength and endurance, Ardworth grappled with his arid studies not the less manfully for a night mainly spent in a printer's office, and stinted to less than four hours actual sleep. But that sleep was profound and refreshing as a peasant's. The nights thus devoted to the Press, (he was employed in the sub-editing of a daily journal,) the mornings to the law, he kept distinct the two separate callings with a stern subdivision of labour, which in itself proved the vigour of his energy and the resolution of his will. Early compelled to shift for himself, and carve out his own way, he had obtained a small fellowship at the small college in which he had passed his academic career. Previous to his arrival in London, by contributions to political periodicals, and a high reputation at that noble debating society in Cambridge which has trained some of the most eminent of living public

men,* he had established a name which was immediately useful to him in obtaining employment on the Press. Like most young men of practical ability, he was an eager politician. The popular passion of the day kindled his enthusiasm, and stirred the depths of his soul with magnificent, though exaggerated, hopes in the destiny of his race. He identified himself with the people; his stout heart beat loud in their stormy cause. His compositions, if they wanted that knowledge of men, that subtle comprehension of the true state of parties, that happy *temperance* in which the crowning wisdom of statesmen must consist — qualities which experience alone can give — excited considerable attention by their bold eloquence and hardy logic. They were suited to the time. But John Ardworth had that solidity of understanding which betokens more than talent, — which is the usual substratum of genius. He would not depend alone on the precarious and often unhonoured toils of polemical literature for that distinction on which he had fixed his steadfast heart. Patiently he plodded on through the formal drudgeries of his new profession, lighting up dulness by his own acute comprehension, weaving complexities into simple system by the grasp of an intellect inured to generalize; and learning to love even what was most distasteful, by the sense of difficulty overcome, and the clearer vision which every step through the mists and up the hill, gave of the land beyond. Of what the superficial are apt to consider genius, John Ardworth had but little. He had some ima-

* Amongst those whom the "Union" almost contemporaneously prepared for public life, and whose distinction has kept the promise of their youth, we may mention the eminent barristers, Messrs. Austin and Cockburn; and amongst statesmen, Lord Grey, Mr. C. Buller, Mr. Charles Villiers, and Mr. Macauley. Nor ought we to forget those brilliant competitors for the prizes of the University, Dr. Kennedy (now head-master of Shrewsbury School) and the late Winthrop M. Praed.

gination, (for a true thinker is never without that,) but he had a very slight share of fancy. He did not flirt with the Muses; on the granite of his mind, few flowers could spring. His style, rushing and earnest, admitted at times of a humour not without delicacy — though less delicate than forcible and deep — but it was little adorned with wit, and still less with poetry. Yet Ardworth had genius, and genius ample and magnificent. There was genius in that industrious energy so patient in the conquest of detail, so triumphant in the perception of results. There was genius in that kindly sympathy with mankind — genius in that stubborn determination to succeed — genius in that vivid comprehension of affairs, and the large interests of the world — genius fed in the labours of the closet, and evinced the instant he was brought in contact with men; evinced in readiness of thought, grasp of memory, even in a rough imperious manner, which showed him born to speak strong truths, and in their name to struggle and command.

Rough was this man often in his exterior, though really gentle and kind-hearted. John Ardworth had sacrificed to no Graces; he would have thrown Lord Chesterfield into a fever. Not that he was ever vulgar, for vulgarity implies affectation of refinement, but he talked loud, and laughed loud if the whim seized him, and rubbed his great hands with a boyish heartiness of glee, if he discomfited an adversary in argument. Or sometimes he would sit abstracted and moody, and answer briefly and boorishly those who interrupted him. Young men were mostly afraid of him, though he wanted but fame to have a set of admiring disciples. Old men censured his presumption, and recoiled from the novelty of his ideas. Women alone liked and appreciated him, as, with their finer insight into character, they generally do, what is honest and sterling. Some strange failings, too, had John Ardworth — some of the usual vagaries and contradictions of clever men. As a system, he was rigidly abstemious. For days together

he would drink nothing but water, eat nothing but bread, or hard biscuit, or a couple of eggs: then having wound up some allotted portion of work, Ardworth would indulge what he called a self-saturnalia — would stride off with old college friends to an inn in one of the suburbs, and spend, as he said triumphantly, 'a day of blessed debauch!' Innocent enough, for the most part, the debauch was; — consisting in cracking jests, stringing puns, a fish dinner, perhaps, and an extra bottle or two of fiery port. Sometimes this jollity, which was always loud and uproarious, found its scene in one of the cider cellars or midnight taverns, but Ardworth's labours on the Press made that latter dissipation extremely rare. These relaxations were always succeeded by a mien more than usually grave, a manner more than usually curt and ungracious, an application more than ever rigorous and intense. John Ardworth was not a good-tempered man, but he was the best-natured man that ever breathed. He was like all ambitious persons, very much occupied with self, and yet it would have been a ludicrous misapplication of words to call him selfish. Even the desire of fame which absorbed him was but a part of benevolence — a desire to promote justice and to serve his kind.

John Ardworth's shaggy brows were bent over his open volumes, when his clerk entered noiselessly, and placed on his table a letter which the twopenny postman had just delivered. With an impatient shrug of the shoulders, Ardworth glanced towards the superscription, but his eye became earnest and his interest aroused, as he recognised the hand. "Again!" he muttered, "what mystery is this? Who can feel such interest in my fate?" He broke the seal, and read as follows: —

"Do you neglect my advice, or have you begun to act upon it? Are you contented only with the slow process of mechanical application, or will you make a triumphant effort to abridge your

apprenticeship, and emerge at once into fame and power? I repeat that you fritter away your talents and your opportunities upon this miserable task-work on a journal. I am impatient for you. Come forward yourself, put your force and your knowledge into some work of which the world may know the author. Day after day, I am examining into your destiny, and day after day I believe more and more that you are not fated for the tedious drudgery to which you doom your youth. I would have you great, but in the senate, not a wretched casuist at the bar. Appear in public as an individual authority, not one of that nameless troop of shadows, contemned while dreaded as, the Press. Write for renown. Go into the world, and make friends. Soften your rugged bearing. Lift yourself above that herd whom you call *the people*. What if you are born of the noble class? What if your career is as gentlemen not Plebeian? Want not for money. Use what I send you, as the young and the well-born should use it; or let it, at least, gain you a respite from toils for bread — and support you in your struggle to emancipate yourself from obscurity into fame.

"YOUR UNKNOWN FRIEND."

A bank-note for £100 dropped from the envelope as Ardworth silently replaced the letter on the table.

Thrice before had he received communications in the same handwriting, and much to the same effect. Certainly to a mind of less strength, there would have been something very unsettling in those vague hints of a station higher than he owned — of a future at variance with the toilsome lot he had drawn from the urn; but after a single glance over his lone position in all its bearings, and probable expectations, Ardworth's steady sense shook off the slight disturbance such misty vaticinations had effected. His mother's family was indeed unknown to him — he was even ignorant of her maiden name. But that very obscurity seemed unfa-

vourable to much hope from such a quarter. The connexions with the rich and well-born are seldom left obscure. From his father's family he had not one expectation. More had he been moved by exhortations now generally repeated, but in a previous letter more precisely detailed — *viz.*, to appeal to the reading public in his acknowledged person, and by some striking and original work. This idea he had often contemplated and revolved, unprompted; but partly the necessity of keeping pace with the many exigencies of the hour, had deterred him, and partly also the conviction of his sober judgment, that a man does himself no good at the bar, even by the most brilliant distinction gained in discursive fields. He had the natural yearning of the Restless Genius; and the Patient Genius (higher power of the two) had suppressed the longing. Still so far, the whispers of his correspondent tempted and aroused. But hitherto he had sought to persuade himself that the communications thus strangely forced on him, arose, perhaps, from idle motives — a jest, it might be, of one of his old college friends, or at best the vain enthusiasm of some more credulous admirer. But the enclosure now sent to him, forbade either of these suppositions. Who that he knew could afford so costly a jest, or so extravagant a tribute? He was perplexed, and with his perplexity was mixed a kind of fear. Plain, earnest, unromantic, in the common acceptation of the word, the mystery of this intermeddling with his fate, this arrogation of the licence to spy, the right to counsel, and the privilege to bestow, gave him the uneasiness the bravest men may feel at noises in the dark. That day he could apply no more — he could not settle back to his Law Reports. He took two or three unquiet turns up and down his smoke-dried cell, then locked up the letter and enclosure, seized his hat, and strode, with his usual lusty swinging strides, into the open air.

But still the letter haunted him. "And if," he said almost audibly, "if I were the heir to some higher station, why then I

might have a heart like idle men; and Helen — beloved Helen!" — he paused, sighed, shook his rough head, shaggy with neglected curls, and added — "As if even then I could steal myself into a girl's good graces! Man's esteem I may command, though poor — woman's love could I win, though rich! Pooh! pooh! every wood does not make a Mercury; and faith, the wood I am made of, will scarcely cut up into a lover."

Nevertheless, though thus soliloquizing, Ardworth mechanically bent his way towards Brompton, and halted, half ashamed of himself, at the house where Helen lodged with her aunt. It was a building that stood apart from all the cottages and villas of that charming suburb, half way down a narrow lane, and enclosed by high melancholy walls, deep set in which a small door, with the paint blistered and weather-stained, gave unfrequented entrance to the demesne. A woman servant of middle age and starched puritanical appearance, answered the loud ring of the bell, and Ardworth seemed a privileged visitor, for she asked him no question, as with a slight nod, and a smileless stupid expression in a face otherwise comely, she led the way across a paved path, much weed-grown, to the house. That house itself, had somewhat of a stern and sad exterior. It was not ancient, yet it looked old from shabbiness and neglect. The vine, loosened from the rusty nails, trailed rankly against the wall, and fell in crawling branches over the ground. The house had once been white-washed, but the colour, worn off in great patches, distained with damp, struggled here and there with the dingy chipped bricks beneath. There was no peculiar want of what is called 'tenantable repair;' the windows were whole, and doubtless the roof sheltered from the rain. But the wood-work that encased the panes was decayed, and house-leek covered the tiles. Altogether there was that forlorn and cheerless aspect about the place, which chills the visitor, he defines not why.

And Ardworth steadied his usual careless step, and crept, as if timidly, up the creaking stairs.

On entering the drawing-room — it seemed at first deserted; but the eye searching round, perceived something stir in the recess of a huge chair — set by the fireless hearth. And from amidst a mass of coverings a pale face emerged, and a thin hand waived its welcome to the visitor.

Ardworth approached, pressed the hand, and drew a seat near to the sufferer's.

"You are better, I hope," he said cordially, — and yet in a tone of more respect than was often perceptible in his deep blunt voice.

"I am always the same," was the quiet answer; "come nearer still. Your visits cheer me."

And as these last words were said, Madame Dalibard raised herself from her recumbent posture, and gazed long upon Ardworth's face of power and front of thought. "You over-fatigue yourself, my poor kinsman," she said, with a certain tenderness: "you look already too old for your young years."

"That 's no disadvantage at the bar."

"Is the bar your means, or your end?"

"My dear Madame Dalibard, it is my profession."

"No, your profession is to rise. John Ardworth," and the low voice swelled in its volume, "You are bold, able, and aspiring — for this, I love you — love you almost — almost as a mother. Your fate," she continued, hurriedly, "interests me; your energies inspire me with admiration. Often I sit here for hours, musing over your destiny to be — so that at times, I may almost say that in your life I live."

Ardworth looked embarrassed, and with an awkward attempt at compliment, he began hesitatingly: "I should think too highly of myself, if I could really believe that you —"

"Tell me," interrupted Madame Dalibard: "we have had many conversations upon grave and subtle matters; we have disputed on the secret mysteries of the human mind; we have compared our several experiences of outward life and the mechanism of the social world, — tell me then, and frankly, what do you think of me? Do you regard me merely as your sex is apt to regard the woman, who aspires to equal men — a thing of borrowed phrases and unsound ideas — feeble to guide and unskilled to teach? or do you recognise in this miserable body a mind of force not unworthy yours, ruled by an experience larger than your own?"

"I think of you," answered Ardworth, frankly, "as the most remarkable woman I have ever met. Yet, do not be angry, I do not like to yield to the influence which you gain over me when we meet. It disturbs my convictions — it disquiets my reason — I do not settle back to my life so easily after your breath has passed over it."

"And yet," said Lucretia, with a solemn sadness in her voice, "that influence is but the natural power which cold maturity exercises on ardent youth. It is my mournful advantage over you, that disquiets your happy calm. It is my experience that unsettles the fallacies which you name 'convictions.' Let this pass. I asked your opinion of me, because I wished to place at your service all that knowledge of life which I possess. In proportion as you esteem me, you will accept or reject my counsels."

"I have benefited by them already. It is the tone that you advised me to assume, that gave me an importance I had not before, with that old formalist whose paper I serve, and whose prejudices I shock; it is to your criticisms that I owe the more practical turn of my writings, and the greater hold they have taken on the public."

"Trifles indeed, these," said Madame Dalibard, with a half

smile. "Let them at least induce you to listen to me; if I propose to make your path more pleasant, yet your ascent more rapid."

Ardworth knit his brows, and his countenance assumed an expression of doubt and curiosity. However, he only replied, with a blunt laugh —

"You must be wise, indeed, if you have discovered a royal road to distinction!

" 'Ah, who can tell how hard it is to climb
The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar!'

A more sensible exclamation than poet's usually preface with their whining 'Ah's' and 'Oh's!'"

"What we *are* is nothing," pursued Madame Dalibard; "what we *seem* is much."

Ardworth thrust his hands into his pockets, and shook his head. The wise woman continued, unheeding his dissent from her premises.

"Everything you are taught to value has a likeness, and it is that likeness which the world values. Take a man out of the streets, poor and ragged, what will the world do with him? Send him to the workhouse, if not to the jail. Ask a great painter to take that man's portrait, rags, squalor, and all; and kings will bid for the picture. You would thrust the man from your doors, you would place the portrait in your palaces. It is the same with qualities, the portrait is worth more than the truth. What is virtue without character? But a man without virtue may thrive on a character! What is genius without success? But how often you bow to success without genius! John Ardworth, possess yourself of the portraits — win the character — seize the success."

"Madam," exclaimed Ardworth, rudely, "this is horrible!"

"Horrible it may be," said Madame Dalibard, gently, and feeling, perhaps, that she had gone too far: "but it is the world's judgment. *Seem*, then, as well as *be*. You have virtue, as I believe. Well, wrap yourself in it — in your closet. Go into the world, and earn character. If you have genius, let it comfort you. Rush into the crowd, and get success."

"Stop!" cried Ardworth; "I recognise you. How could I be so blind? It is you who have written to me, and in the same strain; you have robbed yourself — you, poor sufferer, to throw extravagance into these strong hands. And why? What am I to you?"

An expression of actual fondness softened Lucretia's face, as she looked up at him, and replied: "I will tell you hereafter what you are to me. First, I confess that it is I whose letters have perplexed, perhaps offended you. The sum that I sent, I do not miss. I have more — will ever have more at your command — never fear. Yes, I wish you to go into the world, not as a dependant, but as an equal to the world's favourites. I wish you to know more of men than mere law-books teach you. I wish you to be in men's mouths, create a circle that shall talk of young Ardworth — that talk would travel to those who can advance your career. The very possession of money in certain stages of life gives assurance to the manner, gives attraction to the address."

"But," said Ardworth, "all this is very well for some favourite of birth and fortune; but for me — yet speak, and plainly, you throw out hints that I am what I know not; but something less dependent on his nerves and his brain, than is plain John Ardworth. What is it you mean?"

Madame Dalibard bent her face over her breast, and rocking herself in her chair, seemed to muse for some moments before she answered.

"When I first came to England, some months ago, I desired naturally to learn all the particulars of my family and kindred, from which my long residence abroad had estranged me. John Walter Ardworth was related to my half-sister, to me he was but a mere connexion. However, I knew something of his history, yet I did not know that he *had* a son. Shortly before I came to England, I learned that one who *passed* for his son had been brought up by Mr. Fielden, and from Mr. Fielden I have since learned all the grounds for that belief, from which you take the name of Ardworth."

Lucretia paused a moment; and after a glance at the impatient, wondering, and eager countenance that bent intent upon her, she resumed:

"Your reputed father was, you are doubtless aware, of reckless and extravagant habits. He had been put into the army by my uncle, and he entered that profession with the careless buoyancy of his sanguine nature. I remember those days — that day! Well, to return — where was I? — Walter Ardworth had the folly to entertain strong notions of politics. He dreamt of being a soldier, and yet persuaded himself to be a republican. His notions, so hateful in his profession, got wind; he disguised nothing; he neglected the portraits of things — *Appearances*. He excited the rancour of his commanding officer — for politics then, more even than now, were implacable ministrants to hate — occasion presented itself: during the short peace of Amiens he had been recalled. He had to head a detachment of soldiers against some mob, in Ireland, I believe: he did not fire on the mob according to orders — so, at least, it was said: John Walter Ardworth was tried by a court-martial, and broke! But you know all this, perhaps?"

"My poor father! Only in part: I knew that he had been dismissed the army — I believed unjustly. He was a soldier, and yet he dared to think for himself, and be humane!"

"But my uncle had left him a legacy — it brought no blessing — none of that old man's gold did. Where are they all now? Dalibard, Susan, and her fair-faced husband. Where? Vernon is in his grave — but one son of many left! Gabriel Varney lives it is true! — and I! But that gold — yea, in our hands, there was a curse on it! Walter Ardworth had his legacy — his nature was gay: if disgraced in his profession, he found men to pity and praise him — Fools of Party like himself. He lived joyously — drank or gamed, or lent or borrowed — what matters the wherefore? — he was in debt — he lived at last a wretched, shifting, fugitive life — snatching bread where he could — with the bailiffs at his heels — then, for a short time, we met again."

Lucretia's brow grew black as night, as her voice dropped at that last sentence, and it was with a start that she continued.

"In the midst of this hunted existence, Walter Ardworth appeared, late one night, at Mr. Fielden's with an infant. He seemed, so says Mr. Fielden, ill, worn, and haggard. He entered into no explanations with respect to the child that accompanied him, and retired at once to rest. What follows, Mr. Fielden, at my request, has noted down. Read, and see what claim you have to the honourable parentage so vaguely ascribed to you."

As she spoke, Madame Dalibard opened a box on her table, drew forth a paper in Fielden's writing, and placed it in Ardworth's hand. After some preliminary statement of the writer's intimacy with the elder Ardworth, and the appearance of the latter at his house, as related by Madame Dalibard, &c., the document went on thus: —

"The next day, when my poor guest was still in bed, my servant Hannah came to avise me that two persons were without, waiting to see me. As is my wont, I bade them be shown in.

On their entrance, (two rough farmer-looking men they were, whom I thought might be coming to hire my little pasture field,) I prayed them to speak low, as a sick gentleman was just over head. Whereupon, and without saying a word farther, the two strangers made a rush from the room, leaving me dumb with amazement; in a few moments, I heard voices and a scuffle above. I recovered myself, and thinking robbers had entered my peaceful house, I called out lustily, when Hannah came in, and we both, taking courage, went up stairs, and found that poor Walter was in the hand of these supposed robbers, who in truth were but bailiffs. They would not trust him out of their sight for a moment. However, he took it more pleasantly than I could have supposed possible; prayed me in a whisper, to take care of the child, and I should soon hear from him again. In less than an hour, he was gone. Two days afterwards, I received from him a hurried letter, without address, of which this is the copy: —

"'DEAR FRIEND, — I slipt from the bailiffs, and here I am in a safe little tavern in sight of the sea! Mother Country is a very bad parent to me; Mother Brownrigg herself could scarcely be worse. I shall work out my passage to some foreign land, and if I can recover my health (sea-air is bracing!) I don't despair of getting my bread honestly, somehow. If ever I can pay my debts I may return. But, meanwhile, my good old tutor, what will you think of me? You to whom my sole return for so much pains taken in vain, is another mouth to feed! And no money to pay for the board! Yet you won't grudge the child a place at your table, will you? No, nor kind, saving Mrs. Fielden either — God bless her tender, economical soul! You know quite enough of me to be sure that I shall very soon either free you of the boy, or send you something, to prevent its being an incumbrance. I would say, love and pity the child for *my* sake. But I own I

feel — By Jove, I must be off — I hear the first signal from the vessel, that — Yours, in haste,

"'J. W. A.'"

Young Ardworth stopped from the lecture, and sighed heavily. There seemed to him, in this letter, worse than a mock gaiety; — a certain levity and recklessness — which jarred on his own high principles. And the want of affection for the child thus abandoned was evident — not one fond word. He resumed the statement with a gloomy and disheartened attention.

"This was all I heard from poor erring Walter for more than three years, but I knew, in spite of his follies, that his heart was sound at bottom," (the son's eye brightened here, and he kissed the paper,) "and the child was no burthen to us — we loved it, not only for Ardworth's sake, but for its own, and for charity's, and Christ's. Ardworth's second letter was as follows: —

"'*En iterum Crispinus!* — I am still alive, and getting on in the world — ay, and honestly too — I am no longer spending heedlessly; I am saving for my debts, and I shall live, I trust, to pay off every farthing. First, for my debt to you — I send an order not signed in my name, but equally valid, on Messrs. Drummond, for £250. Repay yourself what the boy has cost. Let him be educated to get his own living — if clever, as a scholar or a lawyer — if dull, as a tradesman. Whatever I may gain, he will have his own way to make. I ought to tell you the story connected with his birth, but it is one of pain and shame; and on reflection, I feel that I have no right to injure him by affixing to his early birth an opprobrium of which he himself is guiltless. If ever I return to England, you shall know all, and by your counsels I will abide. Love to all your happy family.

"'Your grateful Friend and Pupil.'

"From this letter I began to suspect that the poor boy was probably not born in wedlock, and that Ardworth's silence arose from his compunction. I conceived it best never to mention this suspicion to John himself as he grew up. Why should I afflict him by a doubt from which his father shrunk, and which might only exist in my own inexperienced and uncharitable interpretation of some vague words? When John was fourteen, I received from Messrs. Drummond a further sum of £500, but without any line from Ardworth, and only to the effect that Messrs. Drummond were directed by a correspondent in Calcutta to pay me the said sum on behalf of expenses incurred for the maintenance of the child left to my charge by John Walter Ardworth. My young pupil had been two years at the university, when I received the letter of which this is a copy: —

"'How are you? — still well — still happy? — let me hope so! I have not written to you, dear old friend, but I have not been forgetful of you — I have inquired of you through my correspondents, and have learned, from time to time, such accounts as satisfied my grateful affection for you. I find that you have given the boy my name? Well, let him bear it — it is nothing to boast of, such as it became in my person; but, mind, I do not, therefore, acknowledge him as *my* son. I wish him to think himself without parents, without other aid in the career of life than his own industry and talent, — if talent he has. Let him go through the healthful probation of toil — let him search for and find independence. Till he is of age, £150 will be paid quarterly to your account for him at Messrs. Drummonds'. If then, to set him up in any business or profession, a sum of money be necessary, name the amount by a line, signed A. B., Calcutta, to the care of Messrs. Drummond, and it will reach, and find me disposed to follow your instructions. But after that time all further supply from me will cease. Do not suppose,

because I send this from India, that I am laden with rupees; all I can hope to attain is a competence. That boy is not the only one who has claims to share it. Even, therefore, if I had the wish to rear him to the extravagant habits that ruined myself, I have not the power. Yes! — let him lean on his own strength. In the letter you send me, write fully of your family, your sons, and write as to a man who can perhaps help them in the world, and will be too happy thus in some slight degree to repay all he owes you. You would smile approvingly if you saw me now — a steady, money-getting man, but still yours as ever.

"'P. S. — Do not let the boy write to me, nor give him this clue to my address.'

"On the receipt of this letter, I wrote fully to Ardworth about the excellent promise and conduct of his poor neglected son. I told him truly he was a son any father might be proud of, and rebuked, even to harshness, Walter's unseemly tone respecting him. One's child is one's child, however the father may have wronged the mother. To this letter I never received any answer. When John was of age, and had made himself independent of want, by obtaining a college fellowship, I spoke to him about his prospects. I told him that his father, though residing abroad and for some reasons keeping himself concealed, had munificently paid hitherto for his maintenance, and would lay down what might be necessary to start him in business, or perhaps place him in the army; but that his father might be better pleased if he could show a love of independence, and henceforth maintain himself. I knew the boy I spoke to — John thought as I did, and I never applied for another donation to the elder Ardworth. The allowance ceased: John since then has maintained himself. I have heard no more from his father, though I have written often to the address he gave me. I begin to fear that he is dead. I once went up to town and saw one of the heads of Messrs. Drum-

monds' firm — a very polite gentleman, but he could give me no information, except that he obeyed instructions from a correspondent at Calcutta — one Mr. Macfarren — whereon I wrote to Mr. Macfarren, and asked him, as I thought very pressingly, to tell me all he knew of poor Ardworth the elder. He answered shortly, that he knew of no such person at all, and that A. B. was a French merchant, settled in Calcutta, who had been dead for above two years. I now gave up all hopes of any further intelligence, and was more convinced than ever that I had acted rightly in withholding from poor John my correspondence with his father. The lad had been curious and inquisitive naturally, but when I told him that I thought it my duty to his father to be so reserved, he forbore to press me. I have only to add, first, that by all the inquiries I could make of the surviving members of Walter Ardworth's family, it seemed their full belief that he had never been married, and therefore I fear we must conclude that he had no legitimate children, which may account for, though it cannot excuse, his neglect; and secondly, with respect to the sums received on dear John's account — I put them all by, capital and interest, deducting only the expense of his first year at Cambridge, (the which I could not defray, without injuring my own children,) and it all stands in his name at Messrs. Drummonds', vested in the Three Per Cents. That I have not told him of this was by my poor dear wife's advice; for she said, very sensibly, and she was a shrewd woman on money matters, 'If he knows he has such a large sum all in the lump, who knows but he may grow idle and extravagant, and spend it at once, like his father before him; whereas, some time or other, he will want to marry, or need money for some particular purpose, — then what a blessing it will be!'

"However, my dear Madam, as you know the world better than I do, you can now do as you please, both as to communi-

cating to John all the information herein contained as to his parentage, and as to apprising him of the large sum of which he is lawfully possessed.

"MATTHEW FIELDEN.

"P. S. — In justice to poor John Ardworth, and to show that whatever whim he may have conceived about his own child, he had still a heart kind enough to remember mine, though Heaven knows I said nothing about them in my letters, my eldest boy received an offer of an excellent place in a West India merchant's house, and has got on to be chief clerk, and my second son was presented to a living of one hundred and seventeen pounds a-year, by a gentleman he never heard of. Though I never traced these good acts to Ardworth, from whom else could they come?"

Ardworth put down the paper without a word; and Lucretia, who had watched him while he read, was struck with the self-control he evinced when he came to the end of the disclosure. She laid her hand on his, and said,

"Courage! — you have lost nothing!"

"Nothing!" said Ardworth, with a bitter smile. "A father's love and a father's name — nothing!"

"But," exclaimed Lucretia, "is this man your father? Does a father's heart beat in one line of those hard sentences. No, no; it seems to me probable — it seems to me almost certain, that you are —" she stopped, and continued with a calmer accent, "near to my own blood. I am now in England — in London — to prosecute the inquiry built upon that hope. If so — if so — you shall —" Madame Dalibard again stopped abruptly, and there was something terrible in the very exultation of her countenance. She drew a long breath, and resumed, with an evident effort at self-command — "If so, I have a right to the

interest I feel for you. Suffer me yet to be silent as to the grounds of my belief, and — and — love me a little in the meanwhile!"

Her voice trembled, as if with rushing tears, at these last words, and there was almost an agony in the tone in which they were said, and in the gesture of the clasped hands she held out to him.

Much moved (amidst all his mingled emotions at the tale thus made known to him) by the manner and voice of the narrator, Ardworth bent down and kissed the extended hands. Then he rose abruptly, walked to and fro the room, muttering to himself — paused opposite the window — threw it open, as for air, and, indeed, fairly gasped for breath. When he turned round, however, his face was composed, and folding his arms on his large breast with a sudden action, he said aloud, and yet rather to himself than to his listener, —

"What matter, after all, by what name men call our fathers! We ourselves make our own fate! Bastard or noble, not a jot care I. Give me ancestors, I will not disgrace them; raze from my lot even the very name of father, and my sons shall have an ancestor in me!"

As he thus spoke, there was a rough grandeur in his hard face and the strong ease of his powerful form. And while thus standing and thus looking, the door opened, and Varney walked in abruptly.

These two men had met occasionally at Madame Dalibard's, but no intimacy had been established between them. Varney was formal and distant to Ardworth, and Ardworth felt a repugnance to Varney. With the instinct of sound, sterling, weighty natures, he detected at once, and disliked heartily, that something of gaudy, false, exaggerated, and hollow, which pervaded Gabriel Varney's talk and manner — even the trick of his walk, and the cut of his dress. And Ardworth wanted that boyish and beautiful luxuriance of character which belonged to

Percival St. John, easy to please and to be pleased, and expanding into the warmth of admiration for all talent and all distinction. For art, if not the highest, Ardworth cared not a straw: it was nothing to him that Varney painted and composed, and ran showily through the jargon of literary babble, or toyed with the puzzles of unsatisfying metaphysics. He saw but a charlatan, and he had not yet learned from experience what strength and what danger lie hid in the boa parading its colours in the sun, and shifting, in the sensual sportiveness of its being, from bough to bough.

Varney halted in the middle of the room, as his eye rested first on Ardworth, and then glanced towards Madame Dalibard. But Ardworth, jarred from his reverie or resolves by the sound of a voice discordant to his ear at all times, especially in the mood which then possessed him, scarcely returned Varney's salutation, buttoned his coat over his chest, seized his hat, and upsetting two chairs, and very considerably disturbing the gravity of a round table, forced his way to Madame Dalibard, pressed her hand, and said in a whisper, "I shall see you again soon," and vanished.

Varney, smoothing his hair with fingers that shone with rings, slid into the seat next Madame Dalibard, which Ardworth had lately occupied, and said, "If I were a Clytemnestra, I should dread an Orestes in such a son!"

Madame Dalibard shot towards the speaker one of the side-long suspicious glances which of old had characterized Lucretia, and said,

"Clytemnestra was happy! The Furies slept to her crime, and haunted but the avenger."

"Hist!" said Varney.

The door opened, and Ardworth re-appeared.

"I quite forgot, what I half came to know. — How is Helen? Did she return home safe?"

"Safe — yes!"

"Dear girl — I am glad to hear it! Where is she? Not gone to those Mivers' again! I am no aristocrat, but why should one couple together refinement and vulgarity?"

"Mr. Ardworth," said Madame Dalibard, with haughty coldness, "my niece is under my care, and you will permit me to judge for myself how to discharge the trust. Mr. Mivers is her own relation — a nearer one than you are."

Not at all abashed by the rebuke, Ardworth said carelessly, "Well, I shall talk to you again on that subject. Meanwhile, pray give my love to her — Helen, I mean."

Madame Dalibard half rose in her chair, then sunk back again, motioning with her hand to Ardworth to approach. Varney rose and walked to the window, as if sensible that something was about to be said not meant for his ear.

When Ardworth was close to her chair, Madame Dalibard grasped his hand with a vigour that surprised him, and drawing him nearer still, whispered as he bent down —

"I will give Helen your love, if it is a cousin's — or, if you will, a brother's love. Do you intend — do you feel — another, a warmer love? Speak, Sir!" and drawing suddenly back, she gazed on his face, with a stern and menacing expression, her teeth set, and the lips firmly pressed together.

Ardworth, though a little startled, and half angry, answered with the low ironical laugh, not uncommon to him, "Pish! you ladies are apt to think us men much greater fools than we are. A briefless lawyer is not very inflammable tinder. Yes, a cousin's love — quite enough. Poor little Helen! time enough to put other notions into her head; and then — she will have a sweetheart, gay and handsome like herself!"

"Ay," said Madame Dalibard, with a slight smile, "ay, I am satisfied. Come soon."

Ardworth nodded, and hurried down the stairs. As he gained the door, he caught sight of Helen at a distance, bending over a flower-bed in the neglected garden. He paused, irresolute, a moment. "No," he muttered to himself; "no, I am fit company only for myself! A long walk into the fields, and then — away with these mists round the Past and Future; the Present at least is mine!"

END OF VOL. I.

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